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Elementary School Principals' Experiences with Trust and Trust-building

A Dissertation Presented

by

Emily Luuri

Submitted to the Graduate School of Education

Lesley University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

December 2019

Ph.D. Educational Studies  
Educational Leadership Specialization

# Elementary School Principals' Experiences with Trust and Trust-Building

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Graduate School of Education Lesley University

Ph.D. Educational Studies  
Educational Leadership Specialization

## Approvals

*In the judgment of the following signatories, this Dissertation meets the academic standards that have been established for the Doctor of Philosophy degree.*

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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband, Jared.

I love you to the moon and back.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES .....	11
LIST OF FIGURES.....	12
ABSTRACT.....	13
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION .....	15
Background .....	15
Statement of the Problem.....	16
Purpose of the Study .....	19
Research Questions:.....	19
Definition of Terms .....	19
Significance of Study.....	20
Delimitations .....	21
Review of the Literature .....	22
Design of the Study .....	24
Approach .....	24
Role of Researcher .....	25
Participants .....	26
Instrumentation, Data Collection, and Management Procedures.....	27
Data Analysis .....	29
Dissertation Outline .....	30
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW.....	31
Introduction .....	31
Definition of Trust.....	31
Trust Within Organizations.....	34
Portrayals of Trust.....	35
Deterrence-based trust and calculus-based trust .....	35
Knowledge-based trust .....	36
Identification-based trust .....	38
Relational trust .....	38
Institution-based trust .....	39
Models of Organizational Trust.....	39
Integrative model of organizational trust.....	40
Organizational trust model (IABC).....	44
Decision to trust model.....	46
Organizational trust model (Zak, 2018) .....	49
Factors that Affect Trust: Similarities Among Models.....	51
Benevolence .....	52
Honesty and openness .....	53
Competence.....	54

Integrity.....	54
Varying Levels of Trust.....	54
Benefits of trust.....	55
Broken trust.....	55
Trust Between Principals and Staff in Schools .....	58
Principals' Role in Developing Trust.....	58
Specific School-Leader Behaviors Associated with Building Trust.....	59
Benevolence.....	61
Reliability.....	63
Competence.....	64
Honesty .....	65
Openness.....	66
Factors that Influence School Leaders' Trust-Building Behavior .....	67
Professional identities.....	68
Reflective practice.....	71
Emotional intelligence.....	72
Administrative training and preparation.....	76
Evaluation .....	77
Chapter Summary .....	78
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS .....	79
Introduction .....	79
Orientation and Rationale of Study .....	79
Role of the Researcher .....	81
Participants.....	83
Delimitations.....	83
Pilot Interview Participants.....	84
Primary Study Participants .....	84
Data Collection.....	86
Instrumentation .....	86
Pilot Procedures .....	89
Data Collection and Management Procedures.....	89
Data Analysis .....	90
Ethical Considerations .....	92
Trustworthiness .....	93
Credibility.....	93
Transferability.....	94
Dependability.....	95
Confirmability.....	95
Chapter Summary .....	95



CHAPTER 4: RESULTS.....	96
Introduction .....	96
Participants .....	97
Rachel .....	97
Mark .....	97
John .....	98
Lindsey .....	98
Sean .....	98
Stephanie .....	99
Brenda.....	99
Thematic Analysis .....	100
Research Question 1: What experiences have shaped elementary school principals’ views on the importance of trust within schools?.....	100
Essentiality of trust in goal achievement.....	100
Trust is difficult to define .....	102
Research Question 2: What do elementary school principals report as turning-point experiences that influenced their understanding of beliefs and actions with regard to building trust with their staff? .....	103
Effects of broken trust .....	103
Actions to repair trust.....	107
Research Question 3: What experiences do elementary school principals report as having supported or diminished trust with their staff? .....	109
Trust is built through intentionality of principals’ behaviors .....	110
Trust is built through honest and open actions .....	111
Trust is diminished by a lack of perceived competence.....	120
Structural Analysis .....	124
Pivotal Experiences .....	125
Ruminating on Experience .....	128
Explanation of Findings.....	133
Finding 1: Participants strongly endorse trust as essential for goal achievement but are perplexed by its elusive meaning and uncertain manifestation .....	133
Finding 2: Participants’ understanding of trust between staff and the principal is based largely on their experiences interacting with other school leaders where trust was breached .....	135
Finding 3: Participants’ came to understand the need to admit and apologize in order to repair broken trust.....	136
Finding 4: Participants implicitly understand trust is built through a principal’s small, intentional, and daily actions.....	137
Finding 5: Participants’ narratives portrayed honest and open actions as building trust, and actions that revealed a lack of competence as decreasing trust. ....	139

Chapter Summary .....	140
CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, FUTURE RESEARCH, AND FINAL REFLECTIONS .....	142
Introduction .....	142
Summary of Literature Review .....	142
Definition of Trust.....	142
Trust Within Organizations .....	143
Trust Between Principals and Staff in Schools.....	144
Summary of the Study .....	145
Design of the Study .....	146
Limitations.....	147
Summary of Findings.....	148
Finding 1.....	148
Finding 2.....	148
Finding 3.....	149
Finding 4.....	149
Finding 5.....	149
Discussion .....	150
Importance of Trust.....	150
Ongoing Learning Through Reflection .....	150
Utility in the “Five Faces of Trust” .....	151
Complexity of Trust-Impacting Experiences.....	152
Implications for Practice .....	154
Learning About Trust is Ongoing .....	154
Increasing Leaders’ Skills .....	155
Recommendations for Leadership Practice.....	155
Self-Reflection Tool.....	156
Feedback.....	157
Observation of Others .....	157
Recommendations for Future Research .....	157
Diverse Sample .....	158
Staff Members’ Perspectives .....	158
Social-Emotional Training .....	158
Final Reflections.....	159
References.....	162
Appendix A: Interview Script and Protocol .....	173
Appendix B: Email Requesting Participation in Study .....	176
Appendix C: Themes and Categories.....	179

Appendix D: Letter of Consent: Interview .....	181
Appendix E: Lesley University IRB Approval.....	185

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1, Participant Information .....	85
Table 2, Correlation of Guiding Research Questions to Interview Questions.....	88
Table A1, Interview Questions .....	175

## LIST OF FIGURES

### Figure

1. Integrative model of organizational trust.....	42
2. Organization model of trust (IABC).....	46
3. Decision to trust model: Decision tree. ....	47
4. Decision to trust model: Factors.....	49
5. Organizational trust model (Zak, 2018).....	51
6. Impact of pivotal experiences on cognitive schema and leadership practice. ....	127
7. Impact of ruminating on experiences on cognitive schema and leadership practice. ....	130
8. Themes and Finding 1 .....	134
9. Themes and Finding 2 .....	136
10. Themes and Finding 3 .....	137
11. Themes and Finding 4 .....	138
12. Themes and Finding 5 .....	140

## ABSTRACT

Research on leadership within schools has examined principals' varied and complex tasks and highlighted their responsibility to promote positive relationships with their staff. Prominent in that research and in the professional literature on school leadership are arguments that staff trust of a principal—resulting from the principal's trust-building actions—is a crucial factor for school improvement. Despite this priority, there remains a need to study the ways in which principals come to understand the nature of trust and cultivate it within schools. Thus, the purpose of this narrative study was to examine the stories of elementary school principals to derive an understanding of the experiences that influenced their beliefs and practices about trust and trust-building. This research employed a purposeful sampling strategy and involved seven currently practicing elementary school principals within the Massachusetts MetroWest area. Through interviews, these participants shared narratives on experiences that influenced their understanding of trust, instances of their own efforts to increase trust, and accounts of how these past experiences affected their thought processes with regard to their current leadership actions. Thematic and structural analysis of the interview transcripts yielded five findings: (a) Participants strongly endorse trust as essential for goal achievement but are perplexed by its elusive meaning and uncertain manifestations; (b) Participants' understanding of trust between staff and the principal is based largely on their experiences interacting with other school leaders where trust was breached; (c) Participants came to understand the need to admit and apologize in order to repair broken trust; (d) Participants implicitly understand that trust is built through a principal's small, intentional, and daily actions; (e) Participants' narratives portrayed honest and open actions as building trust, and actions that revealed a lack of competence as

decreasing trust. These findings have implications for the training and professional development of school leaders, including the necessity of deepening principals' knowledge of trust, their understanding of the continuous nature of trust, and their skill in analyzing the complex elements of context that influence trust. Systematic observations from peers and supervisors, as well as opportunities to observe other school leaders, were also identified as approaches to support principals in gaining a better understanding of trust-building.

*Keywords:* trust, elementary school principal

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### Background

The role of the principal within a public-school setting is complex. It encompasses numerous responsibilities, including setting organizational goals, creating a climate and culture conducive to learning, and managing a school. According to Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2015), accomplishing these responsibilities depends highly on the principal's ability to develop trust with his or her staff. Increased trust is an "essential element in vibrant, well-performing schools" (p. 257). Those authors reported that although staff trust in school leaders has an indirect impact on student achievement, it also underlies important aspects of school climate, such as professionalism, community engagement, and academic rigor.

R. C. Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman (1995) suggested that the nature of a trusting relationship as it manifests between two people within an organization is different from other types of trust outside of organizational settings. Cummings and Bromiley (1996, p. 302) described *organizational trust* as "the degree of trust between units of an organization or between organizations." Using their definition, organizational trust could describe trust as it manifests in schools. That is, within schools, various "units" exist (p. 302), including principals and staff. According to Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2015), the principal plays a key role in the development of trust among those units within the educational setting.

All individuals are influenced by their experiences (Dewey, 1938/1997). My experiences of participating and engaging in leadership roles within education and athletics organizations exposed me to high and low levels of trust between leaders and followers. These instances sparked my desire to better understand trust within these types of settings.



My experience as a school psychologist and early career principal has continued to shape my interest in understanding trust within the educational setting. As I progressed in my career, I observed the major impact leadership behaviors have on staff's trust. Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999) suggested trust is not easily identified but rather can be observed in a school leader's behaviors. They identified a number of such behaviors in relation to a principal building trust with staff, such as the principal communicating openly and honestly, acting with the school community's best interest in mind, and demonstrating his or her competency.

Like my experiences that influenced my curiosity about school leaders' understanding of trust, how school leaders interpret and act in situations stems from their experiences. When acting or reflecting on an instance, leaders are affected not just by that moment, but also by the trajectory that led them there. Although principals' behaviors can be observed, the experiences that shaped their understanding of the importance of trust and of their role in building trust with staff is not evident by observation alone. Also unknown is their reasoning or the ways they use this knowledge within their administrative school practice to develop trust with their staff.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Trust within an organization correlates positively with positive outcomes, including increased employee job satisfaction, positive perception of the leader, and school improvement (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2009; Ferrin & Dirks, 2002). The establishment and maintenance of trust is complex and dynamic (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). This complexity is compounded further by a lack of agreed-upon definitions or components of trust within the literature (R. C. Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995).

Tschannen-Moran (2014) stated that because of the difficulty in defining the construct of trust, most individuals rely on an “intuitive” (p. 19) feeling when identifying trust. Trust develops through the interdependence of individuals within organizations. This interdependence is characterized by individuals relying on each other to accomplish their wants, needs, or goals. Thus, the establishment and maintenance of trust occurs through social interactions over time (Tschannen-Moran, 2014).

The development of trust within organizations is multifaceted and dependent on multiple factors in relation to both parties—the trustor and the trustee. Tschannen-Moran (2014) suggested that a trustor’s judgment can be influenced by his or her personal beliefs and assumptions, disposition, and emotions. Previous interactions between the trustor and trustee, trustee perceptions of the trustor’s competence, and trustee willingness to trust others also play into the multifaceted nature of the trusting relationship (R. C. Mayer et al., 1995).

Trust can depend heavily on fulfilling expectations the trustor holds for the trustee (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). Parra, de Nalda, and Marco Perles (2011) posited that the development of trust does not depend on traits or personal characteristics, rather it is based on a trustee’s actions and behaviors that align with the trustor’s expectations. When an individual meets these expectations, trust is established or maintained (Tschannen-Moran, 2014).

Conversely, consequences have been correlated with decreased levels of leader trust within organizations (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999). According to Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999), distrust occurs when trustors have expectations of trustees’ behaviors and those expectations are not met. They described distrust as a negative response to the break of trust that begins with feelings of betrayal and violation. These feelings frequently change to

anger or hostility over time. Distrust of an organization's leader produces outcomes that negatively affect the organization. The consequences are detrimental to the functioning of the organization. They include decreases in employee job performance, effective communication, collaboration, and compliance with top-down organizational decisions (Bartolme, 1989; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1999).

Within schools, principals are a key component in the development of trust, especially with their staff (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999) described five faces of trust within a school-specific setting. The expectations for establishing and maintaining trust pertaining to schools center around these concepts (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). They include meeting expectations for leadership behaviors associated with an individual acting in the best interest of the group ("benevolence"; Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999, p. 187), an individual consistently showing dependability ("reliability"; p. 187), and an individual demonstrating skill within a particular area ("competence"; p. 188). Meeting expectations relative to "honesty," being truthful, and "openness" (p. 188)—that is, sharing relevant information—also contribute to the trusting relationship. Perception of these faces of trust, as well as behaviors the trustor exhibits, play a role in the complex nature of the development of trust (Tschannen-Moran, 2014).

The literature suggested that the development and maintenance of trust within organizations is not only crucial, but also complex (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999; Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). School leaders who are unsuccessful at developing trust with their staff face frustration and decreased school productivity. Thus, there is an urgency for more research around leaders developing an understanding of trust within the school setting (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). An examination

of the research on trust indicated a desire to understand how principals foster trust. However, it revealed limited insight into how principals come to understand the nature and indicators of trust, as well as what is involved in cultivating trust within schools. There also appears to be a lack of research on how principals convert this knowledge to action.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to develop a deeper understanding of elementary school principals' experiences that influence their beliefs about and knowledge of trust. It also examined how those experiences affected the principals' leadership actions. Through interviews, this research examined principals' stories and accounts of their development in coming to understand trust within schools and what it means to them within their administrative roles.

### **Research Questions:**

The following three research questions guided this study:

1. What experiences have shaped elementary school principals' views on the importance of trust within schools?
2. What do elementary school principals report as turning-point experiences that influenced their understanding of beliefs and actions with regard to building trust with their staff?
3. What experiences do elementary school principals report as having supported or diminished trust with their staff?

### **Definition of Terms**

The following terms used within the study are defined here:

<b>Trust</b>	An interplay between two parties, in which one is vulnerable and holds an expectation that the other is benevolent, reliable, competent, honest, and open within their interactions (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999)
<b>Experience</b>	How one internalizes a situation or event
<b>Elementary</b>	A school that houses grades between Pre-Kindergarten and Grade 5
<b>Principal</b>	Individual acting in the role of elementary school principal within an elementary school setting.
<b>School Leader</b>	For the purpose of this dissertation, this term refers to a principal
<b>Staff</b>	School professionals who are led by a principal, including teachers and support personnel

### **Significance of Study**

This study is significant because it provides new insights on an important aspect of school leadership. The investigation of principals' experiences with, awareness of, and engagement in trust-building practices is important because increased leader trust correlates to manifold positive school outcomes, including increased staff job satisfaction, leader perception, and school improvement (Bryk et al., 2009; Ferrin & Dirks, 2002). Prior research has supported the importance of trust within organizational settings but has not addressed the experiences that shaped principals' views of trust within school settings or how principals used the insights they gained from their experiences to develop trust with their staff. Thus, the results of this study contribute to the literature on organizational trust, as well as on trust within school settings.

This study also contributes new information regarding training aspiring principals. Identifying principals' experiences dealing with the importance of trust and trust-building

practices brings awareness to their exposure to this topic within their training and practice. This study reveals key experiences that lead to improved trust-building practices with staff.

This study's findings can influence the interpersonal behaviors of current principals. By identifying ways principals increase trust, this study can provide guidance for current school leaders within their practices. Further, by gathering stories from principals, this research yielded factors and new insights related to increasing trust with which school leaders can make modifications to produce an environment that fosters trust within their schools.

Finally, the results of this study provide a starting point for additional research within the area of trust within schools. Given the lack of research related to trust-building behaviors germane to principals' experiences and perspectives, this study provides initial information on knowledge and practices within those specific contexts.

### **Delimitations**

Participation in this research was limited to practicing elementary school principals currently working in schools with a combination of grades from Pre-Kindergarten through Grade 5. This criterion allowed comparison between individuals engaging in the same role. The participants must have had at least 3 years of experience as a principal. The setting was restricted to elementary schools within the Massachusetts MetroWest area. Data collection was conducted via interviews to gather the participating principals' self-reports. No data were collected to verify the accuracy or effectiveness of the trust-building practices they related. Lastly, given this study's small sample size, the findings cannot be generalized to principals in other contexts.

## **Review of the Literature**

The literature review (Chapter 2) provides contextual information to answer the three guiding research questions and upon which the study was framed. Literature from the following bodies were examined: trust within organizations, trust and noneducational settings, trust and educational settings, trust and educational leadership, the psychology of educational leadership, and school-administrator training and licensure.

Within the literature on trust within organizations, various models of trust provided background on components of trust (Hurley, 2012; R. C. Mayer et al., 1995; Shockley-Zalabak, Morreale, & Hackman, 2010; Zak, 2018). Types and portrayals of trust and specific manager or leader behaviors within noneducational settings were discussed (Bijlsma & van de Bunt, 2003; Kramer, 2010; Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, & Camerer, 1998; Rusu & Baboş, 2015). The benefits and consequences of varying levels of leader trust within noneducational settings were also referenced to provide background information on the importance of trust within all organizations (Kath, Magley, & Marmet, 2010; Kramer, 1999; Kramer & Tyler, 1996).

To address the literature on trust and education, models and studies on types of trust within schools were reviewed (e.g., Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1999, 2000). The principal's role in developing trust, as reviewed in Day's (2009), Tschannen-Moran and Gareis's (2015), and Zeinabadi and Rastegarpour's (2010) studies provided insights on how principals view the impact of their actions on trust development. Research on specific behaviors school leaders use to develop trust were referenced, as well (Cosner, 2009; Day, 2009; Handford & Leithwood, 2013; Tschannen-Moran, 2001). Factors that affect teachers' trust of the principal were also reviewed to provide insight into staff's

interpretation of principals' behaviors (Yilmaz & Altinkurt, 2012; Zeinabadi & Rastegarpour, 2010).

Within the literature on the psychology of educational leadership, factors that influence school leaders' behaviors were examined as a context for interpreting why leaders engage in certain actions to develop trust with their staff. This review included research on how leaders form their professional identities, factors that influence the development of those identities, how the identities evolve over time, and how they influence leadership practices (Crow & Møller, 2017; Notman, 2017; Robertson, 2017; Tubin, 2017). The roles of school-leader identity formation and gender were also examined to provide a background for differences between male and female professionals (Lumby, 2014; Murakami & Törnsten, 2017). Additional works from Brackett and Salovey (2006), Gardner (1983), and Goleman (1995, 2005) provided context for the roles of self-awareness and social awareness related to principals' reflections and perceptions of their trust-building practices.

Information regarding Massachusetts school-administrator training and licensure supplied background for what knowledge and trust practices are currently embedded in the training of aspiring principals (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, n.d.-a, 2018). Different types of training, such as internships, field work, and traditional licensure tracks and their impact on professional practice were reviewed (Dodson, 2015; Gentilucci, Denti, & Guaglianone, 2013; Perez, Uline, Johnson, James-Ward, & Basom, 2011). Evaluation systems also were examined to identify if and how principals are held accountable for developing trust with their staff (Babo, 2009; Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2018).



## **Design of the Study**

The following section discusses the design within which the study was framed. It describes the study orientation and participants, as well as the data collection, management, and analysis procedures. The section ends with an analysis of the role I, as researcher, play within the design of the study.

### **Approach**

This study is qualitative in nature and uses a narrative methodology to examine the experiences of principals related to trust. According to Creswell (2013), narrative research aims to describe the experience of individuals by examining a collection of their stories. Such stories center on the characters, place, time, and interactions with others (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Narrative research is grounded in how people make sense or meaning of their experiences. Although various narrative approaches exist, this study is framed within Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) description. Specifically, they suggested that an individual's narrative is influenced by his or her experiences and is based heavily in the social context. They cited Dewey's principle of "continuity of experience" (p. 35), which suggests individuals' pasts shape how they experience subsequent occurrences. It also emphasizes that experiences are created from other experiences. Thus, individuals' narratives or stories are not just how they experience something in the moment, but also are influenced by their prior experiences.

The narrative method was chosen for this study because Clandinin and Connelly (2000) described it as the best way to examine individuals' experiences. This frame provided an understanding of how principals' knowledge is composed within narrative form, their

experiences in practice, and how they view themselves within those experiences. It provided a starting point for further research from the viewpoint of principals, gathering information that only principals can provide and only from their own experiences.

### **Role of Researcher**

Narrative research is interactive in nature, and its data are collected and interpreted through shared meaning between the participant and researcher (Creswell, 2013). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) reported that narrative researchers live their own stories. They bring their own pasts, presents, and futures to the research in which they engage. For instance, researchers' pasts influence them to engage in this type of research. My experience as a psychologist and my fascination with understanding others' stories led me to want to pursue narrative research. Thus, according to Clandinin and Connelly, I would subconsciously bring my own experiences and stories as I engaged in this study. Narrative researchers do not just record others' stories, but also become involved by making meaning of those stories through the research process—researchers become a part of the experience being examined. My awareness and acknowledgement of this process allowed me to remove my subjectivity to the greatest extent possible.

Within narrative methodology, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) cautioned researchers to be aware of how they ask questions, as well as the verbal and nonverbal responses they give. Both communications can influence what and how participants share their stories. Those authors also cautioned researchers to be aware of the impact of the interview setting (place), because it also can sway what participants share.

Thus, interviews for this study were conducted within the principals' schools, providing a confidential and professional atmosphere for the research interactions. I was

cognizant of the need to not dominate the interview time and I allowed the participants to share their stories freely. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) described this caution as a balance of equality between the researcher and participant within the interview setting. A semi-structured interview protocol that included open-ended questions guided the conversation with each participant (Appendix A). I made the purpose of the interview and procedures clear to the participant through explicit conversation and reminders throughout the interview to maintain focus when necessary. I also explicitly explained the reason (and obtained permission) for audio recording the interview (Spradley, 1979).

Spradley (1979) suggested that ethnographic interviews in which participants share their stories are “more formal than friendly conversations” (p. 59), given their direct purpose. Within this study, I provided a casual atmosphere to collect the participants’ narrative stories while guiding the interviews to align with the study’s formal purpose. This balanced environment allowed the participant to use narrative, conversational language while maintaining the interview’s formal and focused procedures.

### **Participants**

Consistent with narrative research, purposeful sampling techniques allowed me to focus on specific individuals who provided insightful information regarding specific experiences (Creswell, 2013). Purposeful sampling provided the opportunity to gather stories this population told to answer the guiding research questions.

I contacted all elementary school principals within the Massachusetts MetroWest via email. The email list was obtained from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education’s (n.d.-b) website. The emails sent to the prospective participants provided information about the study and participation criteria and requested their

participation (Appendix B). Principals interested in being considered for the study were asked to provide basic information, such as their name, school district, gender, and years of experience as a principal via a link within the contacting email. This information was collected via a Google Form and used for further contact with the participants. I aimed for seven to 10 participants. If fewer than seven participants volunteered, then I would have expanded to surrounding towns outside of the MetroWest area. If more than 12 principals volunteered, then I would have selected participants by balancing gender and length of experience as a principal. However, seven principals volunteered and met the participation criteria, so I did not need to modify the sample design.

### **Instrumentation, Data Collection, and Management Procedures**

For this study, data were collected through interviews, which provided in-depth information regarding the participants' experiences (McNamara, 1999). The interview questions (Appendix A) coordinated with the guiding research questions. The data collection instrument and procedures sought to gather the participants' stories about their experiences coming to understand trust within schools and their experiences building trust with their staffs.

The initial interview protocol contained seven broad questions. Possible probing questions also were developed to gaining additional information focused on how the participant experienced the situation inward, outward, backward, and forward (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50). Subsequent interview questions were developed to obtain specific information regarding the research questions. Consistent with narrative research, the interview questions were constructed to gain information on principals' stories and experiences regarding their views on the importance of trust and trust-building experiences.

Pilot procedures of the instrument focused on language clarity, question sequence, and administration time. Five interview pilots of the initial protocol were conducted with four practicing and one former elementary school principals. The data these individuals supplied was not included in the findings of this study. However, their information allowed several changes to the interview protocol, including adjustments to the question wording and addition and removal of some questions and probes to better align with the guiding research questions and to obtain necessary participant background information. The updated interview protocol (Appendix A) was used in the primary study.

Seven participants indicated interest and participated in the primary study, and I interviewed them at their respective school sites. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) discussed the structured nature of interviewing within the narrative methodology. They cautioned that the restrictive nature of strict protocols and time may hinder the participant's ability to tell a well-developed account or story. Therefore, the interviews in this study were implemented with open-ended questions. Although all participants were amenable to additional (later) contact to clarify responses or to gather additional information, I did not need to conduct second interviews because I obtained enough data from the first.

Each interview was audio recorded. I later reviewed and transcribed the recorded interviews and created "interim texts" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 133). *Interim texts* are notes developed from field notes, created to examine the experiences reported and to identify follow-up interview questions. These texts aided me in checking for gaps or clarity of what participants reported and in identifying points of significance.

The transcription files were managed via the computer-assisted qualitative data-analysis software program, Atlas.ti. Electronic data were stored in a password-protected

computer file system, and hard copy data stored within a locked cabinet. All data will be kept protected for 5 years and then destroyed.

### **Data Analysis**

The transcribed files were uploaded to the Atlas.ti software program as a platform for coding the data. To begin the analysis process, all data were extrapolated and organized under the guiding research question it answered. This sorted data was used as a reference when answering all the study's research questions.

*A priori codes* are codes identified before data are collected or analyzed (Saldaña, 2016). For this study, I identified a priori codes based on recurring themes in the literature, including benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty, and openness (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999; Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). After a priori coding, I re-coded the data using descriptive coding and process coding simultaneously (Saldaña, 2016). Using both coding methods allowed me to identify additional categories and themes, as well as compare responses among participants.

Separate from those codes and categories, I used dramaturgical coding to provide additional information on the participants' experiences related to the role of memory and reflection on the identified themes. I analyzed participants' stories for these elements to compare how they came to understand trust through their experiences. Data analysis consisted of breaking down and categorizing the stories and then sorting them into the five themes of external sources of influence, internal sources of influence, social-emotional skills, trust-building actions, and trust-diminishing actions (Appendix C).

All codes were categorized, and themes identified to answer the study's guiding questions. This information is synthesized and reported in the Results (Chapter 4) of this

dissertation. Conclusions and future implications for the findings of this research are discussed in the final chapter.

### **Dissertation Outline**

This study includes five chapters. Chapter 1, Introduction, introduced the study topic and provided the problem statement, study purpose, and general details about the research design. Chapter 2, Literature Review, discusses the existing literature on the topic in which the dissertation is framed. Chapter 3, Methods, describes how I collected the data, my rationale for those collection methods, and how I organized the data. Chapter 4, Results, examines the study findings, and Chapter 5, Discussion, synthesizes those results and addresses their implications, as well presents recommendations for future research.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Introduction**

This chapter reviews relevant literature on school principals' experiences that influenced their beliefs on trust, as well as on how school leaders build trust with their staff. It provides information that influenced the study design and data analysis. The concept of trust is complex, dynamic, and heavily based on individuals' experience (Shockley-Zalabak et al., 2010). As such, this chapter provides general information in the existing literature on the definitions, models, and portrayals of trust within organizations. Further, it reviews additional information on trust as it manifests in schools and with educational leaders. The final section addresses factors that influence principals' behaviors relative to building trust with their staff.

### **Definition of Trust**

A single, universally accepted definition of trust does not exist within the literature (Hosmer, 1995; R. C. Mayer et al., 1995; Rousseau et al., 1998). This could be due to its "hazy and diffuse" (Hosmer, 1995, p. 381) nature or its many layers (Rousseau et al., 1998). Across disciplines, the multilayers of trust relate to individuals' dispositions, decisions, and interpersonal networks, as well as to the context or environment (Rousseau et al., 1998). Culture also plays a role in the perception of trusting others. An understanding of trust in one culture may radically differ from that in another culture (Shockley-Zalabak et al., 2010). Due to trust's complexity and various meaning across disciplines and cultures, no common definition of trust has been accepted within the literature.

Trust is difficult to define given its close relation to other constructs, such as cooperation, confidence, and predictability (R. C. Mayer et al., 1995). Researchers frequently



referenced these constructs when defining trust; however, differences exist. For instance, *cooperation*, or working together for mutual benefit, is a behavior and hence not synonymous with trust (R. C. Mayer et al., 1995; Rousseau et al., 1998). It is, however, a byproduct of trust. Confidence that a person will follow through on a commitment is a component of trust but not necessary for the existence of trust. Lastly, the literature identified a connection between *predictability* and trust, especially the predictable behavior of a trustee, but ultimately predictability is a separate construct from trust (R. C. Mayer et al., 1995).

Although a universal definition of trust does not exist, within the literature many descriptions of trust have similar elements. Hosmer (1995) and Rousseau, Sitkin, Burt, and Camerer (1998) reviewed multiple definitions of trust and identified similarities. For example, Hosmer (1995) identified the following commonalities:

- Trust is frequently considered within the context of “optimistic expectations” (p. 390). Individuals engaging in trust are acting within an uncertain event or behavior and hoping, by the act of trusting, that they will achieve a more favorable outcome.
- Vulnerability is present. Vulnerability typically emerges as the outcome of being dependent on another person’s behavior, as well as of the chance of trust being broken. Lack of control over the person receiving the trust induces exposure to physical and emotional risk.
- Trust is voluntary, not forced, with the goal of cooperation for mutual benefit. Accordingly, trust cannot be mandated or enforced. Organizational hierarchies and contracts do not establish or maintain trust; rather, these social structures often diminish it.

- Lastly, there is a common underlying moral or ethical component within the definitions that reflects protecting or doing right by others.

Like Hosmer (1995), Rousseau et al. (1998) identified common elements that exist across definitions of trust. These include:

- The trustee has “confident expectations” of and “a willingness to be vulnerable” with another (p. 394). Across domains, trust encompasses one party’s belief that the other party will act in a positive, certain way. This allows the trusting party to be vulnerable to harm from the party being trusted.
- There is the presence of risk. *Risk* is “the perceived probability of loss, as interpreted by a decision maker” (p. 395). This construct is based on the reciprocal relationship of expected positive behavior and contains the risk of uncertainty of the other party’s actions.
- There is interdependence among the parties involved. This occurs because one party relies on the other for something else. The trusting party is vulnerable to the other because they act on a belief in the other party’s actions but ultimately are uncertain of the actual outcome.

After examining the existing literature, Hosmer (1995) synthesized his own definition of “trust” that also reflects components Rousseau et al. (1998) later identified. Hosmer (1995) described trust as:

The optimistic expectation by one person, group, or firm of the behavior of another person, group, or firm in a common endeavor or economic exchange, under conditions of vulnerability and dependence on the part of the trusting party, for the purpose of facilitating cooperation between both parties that will

result in an ultimate joint gain, given the lack of effective contractual, hierarchical, legal, or social enforcement methods, with reliance upon a voluntary accepted duty by the trusted party to protect the rights and interests of all others engaged in the endeavor or exchange. (pp. 392–393)

Thus, trust is an “underlying psychological condition that can cause or result from . . . actions” (Rousseau et al., 1998, p. 395). Trust is not a mechanism for control but is based on positive expectations of others. In fact, the existence of controls can be a sign of a lack of trust and diminish the current trust level. Although some researchers viewed trust as consistently present or absent within a relationship, the majority acknowledged that it fluctuates over time and is influenced by the interactions of the trustor and trustee.

### **Trust Within Organizations**

Trust is an “essential element” for organizational success (Shockley-Zalabak et al., 2010). The concept of trust as it manifests within organizations possesses a unique dynamic compared to trust outside of organizational systems. Specifically, trust within organizations is viewed as a “social resource” (Kramer & Cook, 2004, p. 2) and depends heavily on social interactions among the organizations’ members (Ebert, 2009; Shockley-Zalabak et al., 2010). This view of trust is contradictory to previous beliefs that emphasized trust as a personal characteristic (Schoorman, Mayer, & Davis, 2007).

Organizations function through interdependent work of group members and cooperative member interactions (Kramer & Tyler, 1996; R. C. Mayer et al., 1995; Shockley-Zalabak et al., 2010). These social interactions affect trust among the group members.

Organizations are unique because they contain hierarchical systems with uneven power among members (Diefenbach & Sillince, 2011). Many types of relationships exist

within organizations, including peer to peer, peer to manager, and manager to top leaders. All relationships work together within the organization and are influenced by trust (Shockley-Zalabak et al., 2010, p. 13). This hierarchical-system structure differentiates trust among group members and can add complexity to understanding trust within organizations (Shockley-Zalabak et al., 2010). According to Kramer and Cook (2004), trust among organizational members and trust between leaders and followers manifest in different ways.

### **Portrayals of Trust**

Trust is multifaceted and can be examined from multiple perspectives. When trust is examined on the individual level within organizations, it is between a trustor and trustee (Rousseau et al., 1998). The literature identified various portrayals of trust that exist within organizations, such as deterrence-based, knowledge-based, identification-based, relational, and institution-based trusts (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996; Rousseau et al., 1998; Shapiro, Sheppard, & Cheraskin, 1992; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000).

**Deterrence-based trust and calculus-based trust.** According to Shapiro, Sheppard, and Cheraskin (1992), deterrence-based trust is grounded in reliability and consistency of people doing what they say they will do. The persons being trusted follow through with their promises out of fear they will lose the relationship if they do not. This portrayal of trust typically occurs early in relationships or is based in short-term business decisions (Rousseau et al., 1998).

Lewicki and Bunker (1996) added to Shapiro et al.'s (1992) description of deterrence-based trust to include the opposite. Specifically, they proposed that there are rewards for parties acting as they say they will. This kind of trust is based on transactions and estimations of risk according to gains and losses. Thus, this calculus-based trust is maintained by the

outcomes, consequences, and potential benefits. Like Shapiro et al. (1992), Lewicki and Bunker (1996) acknowledged the “deterrence element” (p. 120) as the primary motivator within relationships engaging in calculus-based trust. They listed several conditions that must exist for deterrence to work (p. 120):

- The consequence of the loss of the relationship must be greater than the potential gain.
- Both parties must monitor the other’s behavior.
- The parties must be willing to enact the consequences of removing the benefits or abolishing the relationship.
- A party’s willingness toward risk is affected by their predisposition or previous actions within the relationship.

Lewicki and Bunker (1996) also described how calculus-based trust fluctuates between the trustor and trustee. For example, it is increased through consistency of the trusted individual’s behavior. Discrepancies between the trustor’s expectation of the trustee or inconsistency in an individual’s promises and actions lead to reduced trust or loss of the relationship. Because there is no prior experience between the parties, the trusting individual typically is more careful with the degree of risk with which he or she is willing to engage. Thus, an individual’s consistent behavior at this initial stage is crucial to developing the trusting relationship (p. 126). A relationship based on calculus-based trust may end after the transaction is completed (Rousseau et al., 1998).

**Knowledge-based trust.** Knowledge-based trust is based on the predictability of another individual’s actions. Such information is gathered through interactions between the trustor and trustee over time (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996; Shapiro et al., 1992). This trust

develops when the trustor forms perceptions about the trustee's behaviors through interactions in a variety of contexts. Based on this knowledge, the trusting party can reasonably predict if the person being trusted will engage in a trustworthy manner. Whereas calculus-based trust is based on a fear of consequences, knowledge-based trust is based on information gathered over time (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996, p. 121).

Along with knowledge acquired over time that leads to predicting another's behavior, Shapiro et al. (1992) described two other dimensions of knowledge-based trust. The first is that when a party acts predictably, trust increases because the person who is trusting can predict the other party's behavior. The opposite is also true. When an individual acts in an untrustworthy manner, trust decreases. The second dimension Shapiro et al. described is the need for frequent and regular interactions. That is, when the trustor and trustee interact regularly, the trustor's accuracy in predicting the other person's behavior increases. If too much time passes without interaction, the trusting party may not feel as confident in his or her ability to predict the other's behavior.

At this stage, trust can fluctuate due to the unpredictability of behaviors (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996, p. 126). When a person engages in unpredictable behavior or behavior that does not align with previous behavior patterns, trust may diminish. If the trustee can reasonably explain and understand this unpredictable behavior, then knowledge-based trust is relatively unchanged. However, when the trustee engages in an unpredictable behavior that the trustor perceives as "freely chosen" (p. 127), then trust diminishes. The individual who is trusting must redefine the level of trust in the other person and in the relationship. Knowledge-based trust can be rebuilt through continuous, predictable interactions either aligning with the new perceptions or re-affirming the previous view (pp. 126–127).

**Identification-based trust.** Identification-based trust is grounded in empathy and mutual understanding of wants, intentions, and priorities (Lewicki & Bunker, 1996; Shapiro et al., 1992). Often, these factors align with the trusting party's values. Based on this deep understanding, one party can act for another party without being monitored. This portrayal of trust encompasses group membership and shared goals that lead to cooperative behavior. Because of this shared identity, parties can trust that the other will act benevolently.

As individuals develop relationships, they experience calculus-based trust and knowledge-based trust. Through these interactions, the parties form an understanding of what they need to do to maintain trust with the other party. Along with fulfilling promises and behaving predictably, Shapiro et al. (1992) described establishing a collective identity, existing in close proximity to each other, and establishing shared goals and values as ways to strengthen identification-based trust.

According to Lewicki and Bunker (1996), a violation of identification-based trust has a much larger negative impact than would a violation of calculus-based trust or knowledge-based trust because violations of identify-based trust go against shared values or common goals. They may even be moral violations. These digressions significantly affect the other parties' perceptions and lead to questioning their shared commitment to the group. Lewicki and Bunker also suggested a secondary impact of this type of violation when trustors question their willingness to trust someone who could break trust in this way (pp. 127–128).

**Relational trust.** According to Rousseau et al. (1998), relational trust is derived from “repeated interactions over time between the trustor and trustee” (p. 399). It is based on sharing information and demonstrating reliability and dependability within interactions between the trustor and trustee. As these parties interact positively, their relationship

strengthens and their level of willingness to take risks and be vulnerable increases. This portrayal of trust involves more than transactional exchanges of goods. It encompasses a variety of social exchanges, including social-emotional support. Over time, relational trust can transform from good-faith intentions to a shared identity between the trustor and trustee.

**Institution-based trust.** Institutional-based trust is grounded in organizational supports that foster trust within an organization or between an individual and an organization. The presence of within-organization structures and policies promotes trust within the organization (Rousseau et al., 1998). Examples of these policies include licensure and certifications to practice or contractual agreements (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). Institution-based trust can also exist in the form of an organization's reputation and may increase due to societal factors, such as laws and policies (Rousseau et al., 1998). Rousseau et al. (1998) stated that further research needs to be conducted to identify how institutional-based trust affects the interpersonal trust of organizational members.

The aforementioned portrayals of trust are categorized by a singular premise or cause of trust. The following section describes models of trust depicting the interplay of elements that affect trust.

### **Models of Organizational Trust**

Several researchers have developed models of trust within organizations (Hurley, 2012; R. C. Mayer et al., 1995; Shockley-Zalabak et al., 2010; Zak, 2018). Dirks and Skarlicki (2004) indicated that most research on trust in leaders is categorized as either relationship-based trust or character-based trust. However, comprehensive models of trust incorporate aspects of both perspectives, and perceptions of characteristics of the trustee, as



well as the impact of the social relationship that forms over time (Brower, Schoorman, & Tan, 2000).

*Relationship-based trust* focuses on interpersonal relationships between the leader and followers, described as a “social bond” (Kramer & Cook, 2004, p. 5). This type of trust, built through interactions over time, is based on the reciprocal nature of caring between the trustor and trustee. Relationship-based trust involves sharing a common identity, background, or goal that forms the foundation for positive interpersonal exchanges over time. It is grounded in the idea that if the followers feel the leader cares about them, they will engage in mutually beneficial behaviors.

In contrast to relationship-based trust, *character-based trust* is based on the trustor’s perception of the trustee’s trustworthiness characteristics, including competence, benevolence, and fairness. Trustees act according to the leader’s desires because they perceive the leader as competent and as acting in the organization’s best interest. This perception is based on the trustee’s scrutiny of the leader’s behavior because leaders have the authority to make decisions that directly affect the follower (Dirks & Skarlicki, 2004). According to Brower, Schoorman, and Tan (2000), perceptions of the trustee develop through the social exchange of the trustor and trustee over time.

The following sections briefly outline four models of trust within organizations and identify similarities among the models. These models were chosen because they provide a comprehensive view of trust that incorporates components that can be categorized as both character-based and relationship-based.

**Integrative model of organizational trust.** R. C. Mayer et al. (1995) developed a model of trust as it manifests within organizations. It focuses on the role of the *trustor*, the

person who is trusting another party, and the *trustee*, the person being trusted. The definition of trust R. C. Mayer et al. used as the foundation for this model emphasized the trustor's perception of the trustee:

The willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party. (p. 712)

Using this definition, R. C. Mayer et al. (1995) developed a cognitive model of trust between two parties within an organizational setting (Figure 1). The literature on trust frequently referenced this model (e.g., S.-E. Kim, 2005; Knoll & Gill, 2010; R. C. Mayer & Davis, 1999; R. C. Mayer & Gavin, 2005; McKnight, Choudhury, & Kacmar, 2002). Its focus is limited to trust within organizational relationships. Within R. C. Mayer et al.'s (1995) model, trust is presented as unidirectional from the trustor's perception of the trustee to the trust outcomes, with particular emphasis on the trustor's interpretation of the trustee's characteristics. It illustrates antecedents and outcomes of trust from the trustor's view. Additions to create a more comprehensive model also were noted in the literature (R. C. Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 2007; Parra, de Nalda, & Marco Perles, 2011).

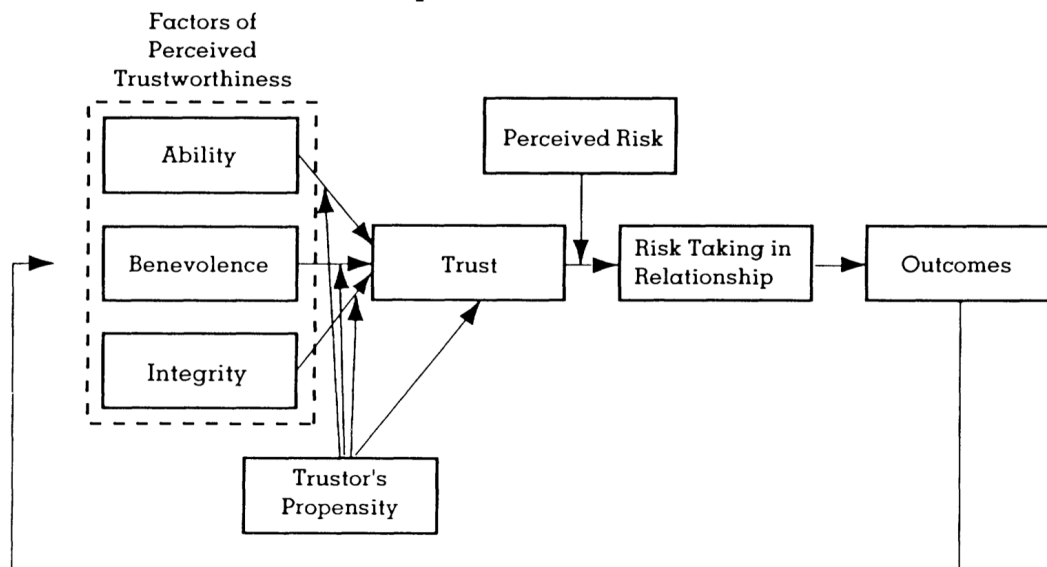


Figure 1. Integrative model of organizational trust. Reprinted with permission from “An Integrative Model of Organizational Trust,” by R. C. Mayer, J. H. Davis, and F. D. Schoorman, 1995, *Academy of Management Review*, 20, p. 715. Copyright 1995 by the Academy of Management and JSTOR.

R. C. Mayer et al.’s (1995) model has a number of antecedent and consequent components affecting trust (Figure 1). Although the model is a continuous loop, it begins with factors of perceived trustworthiness. These factors include the trustor’s perception of the trustee’s competencies (*ability*), belief the trustor is acting with the trustee’s best interest in mind (*benevolence*), and belief the trustor acts by a set of principles similar to the trustee’s (*integrity*). Even though these components are described as characteristics, the context and interactions with the trustee heavily influences the trustor’s perception of them.

The integrative model of trust also identifies components that act on trust or are acted on by trust within the interpersonal relationship. The *trustor’s propensity* component is described as the trustor’s willingness to trust others. An individual’s previous experience and

perception of factors related to trustworthiness, as well as the product of trust, heavily influence propensity (R. C. Mayer et al., 1995). *Risk-taking in relationships* is the next component of this trust model. R. C. Mayer et al. (1995) argued that vulnerability is not demonstrated when an individual is *willing* to trust; rather, that risk occurs with the trusting *action*. Engaging in risk actions within the trust situation demonstrates the trustor's vulnerability. As this model suggests, trust leads to risk-taking within the interaction between the two parties but is situationally dependent. Engaging in this trust process leads to outcomes, or changes, in trust levels based on interactions between the trustor and trustee.

R. C. Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman (2007) updated their original integrative model of organizational trust to acknowledge the most recent literature on trust and their views on additions to their theory. They incorporated their own and others' research into a newer model. They reported a shift from the previously accepted idea that trust is a personal characteristic toward it being a component of interpersonal interaction. They also cited the impact of time as a variable that influences levels of trust. Finally, they recommended additional research on time's influence to gain a deeper understanding of its impact.

Within this update, R. C. Mayer et al. (2007) added the impact of new components to their original cognitive model. They suggested that these new components affect the trust process but had not yet determined their influence. Thus, R. C. Mayer et al. did not supply an updated graphic of the model.

The first added component was involvement of emotions within the trust process. The emotional state affects the trustor's evaluation of the situation, decision-making, and perceptions of the antecedents (i.e., ability, benevolence, and integrity; R. C. Mayer et al., 1995). R. C. Mayer et al. (2007) acknowledged the diminishing of elevated emotional states

over time, which also affects the trust process. Whereas their original theory ignored the impact of culture and location, their update suggested that culture most affects the *propensity* variable, which they described as “personality, experience, and culture” (p. 351). They named specific trust variables that differ among cultures as trust toward strangers, task–relationship orientation, avoidance–confrontation of uncertainty, and perceptions of ability, benevolence, and integrity.

R. C. Mayer et al. (2007) also acknowledged factors that diminish trust, which they had not addressed within their original theory, including violation of trust, repair of trust, and distrust. A *violation of trust* raises an emotional reaction in the trustor. To *repair* this trust, acknowledgement of how trust was broken and the level of damage it caused must occur—repairing trust depends on these variables. After reviewing the literature, R. C. Mayer et al. (2007) reported that distrust is on the opposite end of the trust–distrust continuum. Their theory describes *trust* as the act of taking risks; thus, *distrust* is not taking interpersonal risks at all.

**Organizational trust model (IABC).** The organizational trust model developed by the International Association of Business Communication (IABC) Research Foundation sought to understand “what many today find critical to their business success” (Shockley-Zalabak et al., 2010, p. 26). Fifty-three organizations from a variety of manufacturing and service sector organizations, including pharmaceutical, chemical, high-tech, insurance, banking, healthcare, retail, hotel, government, education, and nonprofit groups, participated in this research study. The research spanned the countries of Australia, Hong Kong, India, Italy, Japan, Singapore, and the United States (pp. 26–27).

The IABC research began with 20 cross-discipline focus groups. The data collected were analyzed for common domains of trust. This analysis produced five emergent drivers of trust. These elements were further explored in a survey of 4,000 employees within various countries and vocations. The five drivers, identified as *competence*, *openness and honesty*, *concern for employees/stakeholders*, *reliability*, and *identification*, were stable across “cultures, languages, industries, and types of organizations” (Shockley-Zalabak et al., 2010, p. 27). Shockley-Zalabak, Morreale, and Hackman (2010) further defined these drivers (Figure 2):

- **Competence** is the ability of the organization to meet its goals through its leadership and employees’ skills. It directly relates to the organization’s ability to meet the challenges of the environment, as well as its efficiency and quality of products.
- **Openness and honesty** relates to how the organization communicates problems and handles disagreements. It addresses leaders keeping employees’ sensitive information confidential and providing honest job-evaluation feedback.
- **Concern for employees/stakeholders** relates to supervisors acting in their employees’ best interest. Employees must believe their supervisors listen to their ideas and concerns and subsequently act on them for their well-being.
- **Reliability** is the ability of supervisors within the organization to meet their commitments, act consistently to communicate changes and the rationale for those changes, and address concerns.
- **Identification** relates to personal connections between supervisors and employees, as well as alignment of the organization’s core values and its employees.

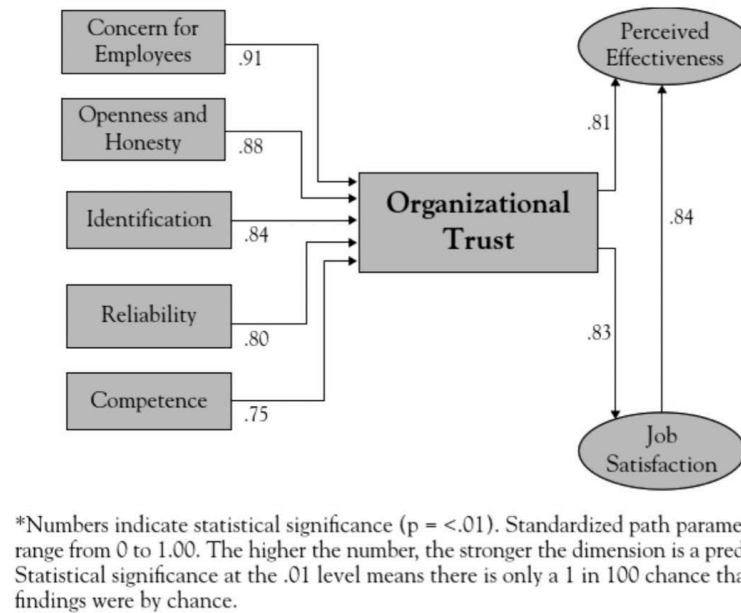


Figure 2. Organization model of trust (IABC). Reprinted with permission from *Building the High Trust Organization: Strategies for Supporting Five Key Dimensions of Trust* (p. 84), by P. Shockley-Zalabak, S. Morreale, and M. Hackman, 2010, San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. Copyright 2010 by Jossey-Bass.

**Decision to trust model.** According to Hurley (2012, p. 1), “Trust is the degree of confidence you have that another party can be relied on to fulfill commitments, be fair, be transparent, and not take advantage of your vulnerability.” Through research on trust, Hurley developed the decision to trust model to help leaders make better decisions, build trust, and identify when and how to repair trust when it is broken. Hurley’s model (Figure 3) is based on the belief that there is a continuum from trust to distrust. Through the interactions and experiences of one party with another, the decision to trust moves along that continuum. A person’s decision to trust another individual results in either an affirmation of trust or a loss of trust. An individual’s choice not to trust another results in ending the relationship or

continuing it with caution. These interactions between the trustor and trustee influence this model's situational factors.

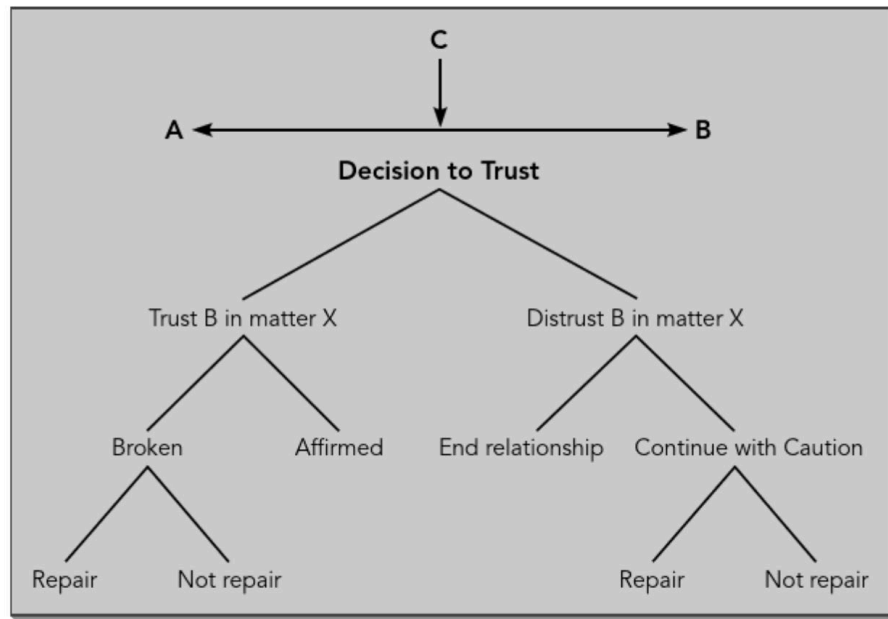


Figure 3. Decision to trust model: Decision tree. Reprinted with permission from *The Decision to Trust: How Leaders Create High-Trust Organizations* (p. 10), by R. F. Hurley, 2012, San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. Copyright 2012 by Jossey-Bass.

In Hurley's (2012) factors model (Figure 4), he identified 10 essential elements of trust. Three of these elements are factors of the trustor, and seven relate to situational elements. The three trustor factors are characteristics of the individual who is trusting the other:

- **Risk tolerance:** How likely the trustor is to take risks.
- **Psychological adjustment:** How adjusted these individuals are. Well-adjusted people feel more comfortable and are more willing to take risks. People who are not well



adjusted view the world as threatening, have anxiety with trusting situations, and thus are less likely to trust.

- **Power:** The level of power the individual has. People with more power tend to trust their subordinates more due to having the authority to punish if trust is broken.

The seven situational factors are environmental circumstances and involve the relationship between the trustor and trustee:

- **Situational security:** The likelihood the trustor will get hurt. The more likely the person will be harmed, the less likely they will trust.
- **Similarities:** These are the commonalties between the trustor and trustee. Trustors are more likely to trust if they have similarities with the trustee.
- **Interests:** When the trustor's and trustee's interests align, they are more likely to trust.
- **Benevolent concern:** Putting other's interests above their own. People are more likely to trust when they feel the other person acts with benevolence.
- **Capability:** How well the individual can fulfill their responsibilities. Individuals tend to trust more when they perceive the other person as competent in their role.
- **Predictability and integrity:** When individuals feel they can predict the behavior of the trustee, they are more likely to trust.
- **Communication:** Frequent and open communication increases the trustor's level of trust of the trustee.

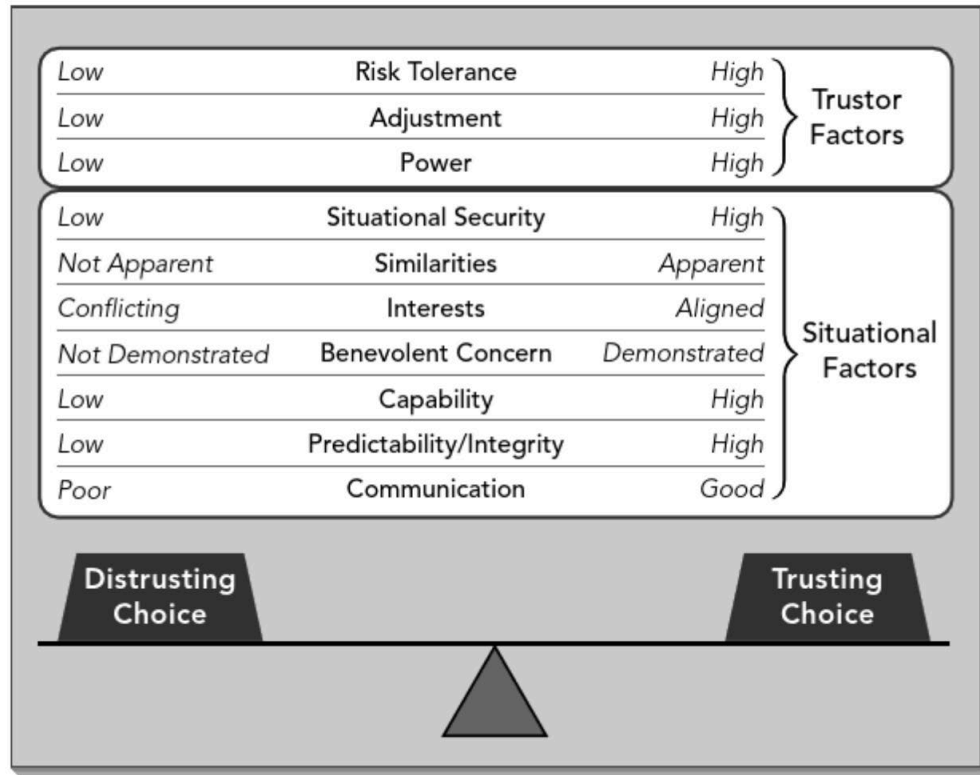


Figure 4. Decision to trust model: Factors. Reprinted with permission from *The Decision to Trust: How Leaders Create High-Trust Organizations* (p. 28), by R. F. Hurley, 2012, San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. Copyright 2012 by Jossey-Bass.

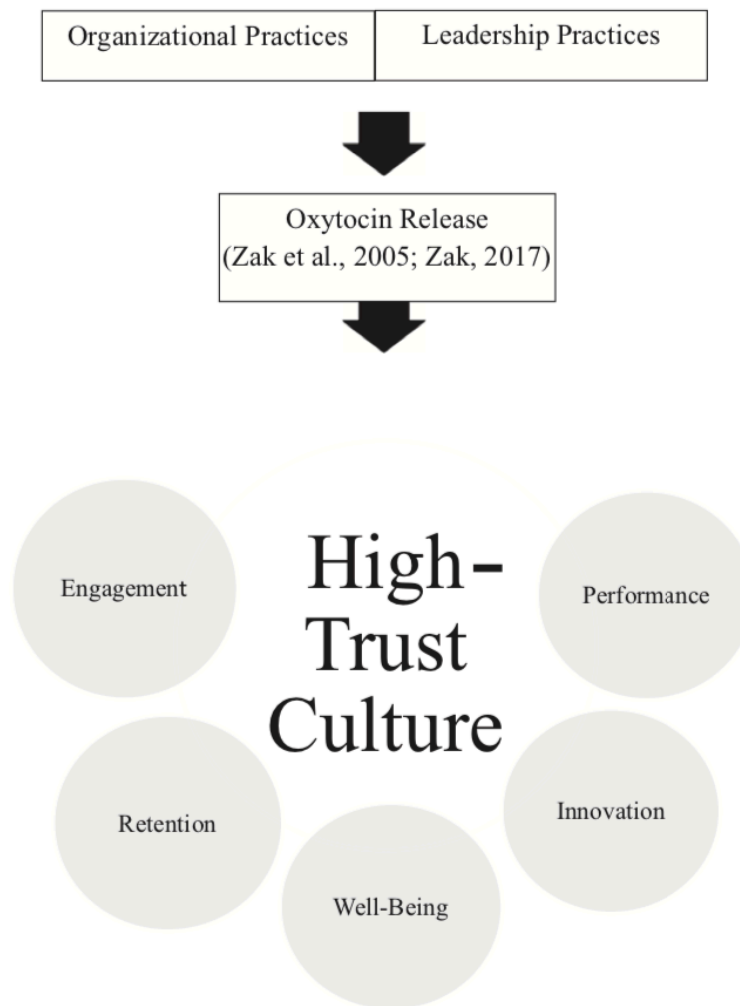
According to this model, an individual's decision to trust is on a continuum. This "trust state" (Hurley's, 2012, p. 26) is a decision made considering all these factors. This state is a combination of all 10 essential elements taken into consideration together. Thus, the trustor's decision to trust is a balance where varied factors (low/high) could counterbalance each other along the continuum. These factors depend highly on the individuals who are trusting and their experiences with the trustee.

**Organizational trust model (Zak, 2018).** The organizational trust model Zak (2018) developed emerged from his work in neuroscience. According to Zak, oxytocin is a chemical

in the brain that is associated with an individual's trustworthiness. High oxytocin levels lead to leader-type behaviors by enhancing empathy in the individual. Zak's model emphasizes the important role leadership behaviors have on the trust of their followers. Zak combined his research with that of other neuroscience researchers on trustworthiness to identify common outcomes for organizations that have high trust cultures. He found that organizations with high levels of trust also have increased employee engagement, retention, innovation, performance, and self-reported well-being compared to organizations with low levels of trust (p. 48).

Along with this model (Figure 5), Zak (2018, p. 49) identified eight factors that, according to his model, are the foundation for trust. These factors increase oxytocin in the brain, which, in turn, increases trust:

- **Ovation:** Recognizing high performing employees
- **Expectation:** Cooperating as a group to solve and work through challenges
- **Yield:** Employees decide how to accomplish a task
- **Transfer:** Allowing employees to choose projects on which they want to work
- **Openness:** Honest and frequent communication of information with employees
- **Caring:** Building relationships with others through showing support and care
- **Investing:** Taking time to enhance personal and professional growth
- **Natural:** Leaders act authentically and honestly with their employees



*Figure 5.* Organizational trust model (Zak, 2018). Reprinted with permission from “The Neuroscience of High-Trust Organizations,” by P. J. Zak, 2018, *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 70(10), p. 48. Copyright 2018 by Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research.

### **Factors that Affect Trust: Similarities Among Models**

These models of organizational trust (Hurley, 2012; R. C. Mayer et al., 1995; Shockley-Zalabak et al., 2010; Zak, 2018) have components that can be categorized as

*character-based* and *relationship-based* trust. They contain common elements across all or some models. This section compares the models and identifies similar components.

The models highlight the importance of the context within the current situation, as well as previous interactions with the trustee and other trust experiences, when describing how trust is affected (R. C. Mayer et al., 1995; Zak, 2018). Regarding context, Zak (2018) discussed the importance of creating an organizational culture that has a high level of trust. Such a culture also has high levels of engagement, retention, innovation, performance, and well-being. R. C. Mayer et al. (1995) also identified that the context of the situation and previous interactions with the trustor and others has an impact on the trustee's level of trust within their model.

According to these models, the trustor's characteristics also play a role in establishing trust with others. R. C. Mayer et al. (1995) identified "trustor's propensity," the individual's willingness to trust others, as a factor. Propensity includes not only experiences with the trustee, but also general experiences in which the trustee met or did not meet the trustor's expectations. R. C. Mayer et al.'s concept was like Hurley's (2012) model, which identified the trustor's "risk tolerance"—how likely the trustor is to take risks—as an essential element affecting the decision to trust another person. All models identified the role of the trustor's perception of the trustee. Across multiple models, the factors of *benevolence*, *honesty and openness*, *competence*, and *integrity* were identified as influencing a trustor's willingness to trust.

**Benevolence.** Benevolence, or supervisors listening to their employees' concerns and acting in their best interests (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999), was included in all models (Hurley, 2012; R. C. Mayer et al., 1995; Shockley-Zalabak et al., 2010; Zak, 2018). For

instance, benevolence is identified as a factor of perceived trustworthiness in the trustee (R. C. Mayer et al., 1995) and one of the five drivers of trust (i.e., concern for employees) within the IABC organizational model of trust (Shockley-Zalabak et al., 2010).

Aligned with the concept of benevolence, Hurley's (2012) model identifies "benevolent concern" as a situational factor in the trust level between a trustor and a trustee. According to that model, people are more likely to trust if they feel the other person acts in a way that puts the trustor's best interest first. Hurley also identified the factor of "situational security," that is, how likely the trustor would be to get hurt if they engaged in trusting the trustee. The more likely people perceive that they will be harmed, the less likely they are to trust. Also related to acting in the best interest of others, Zak's (2018) model includes a "caring" factor that emphasizes the importance of building relationships with others by showing support and kindness in leadership behaviors.

**Honesty and openness.** The concepts of honesty and openness were also referenced across three of the models (Hurley, 2012; Shockley-Zalabak et al., 2010; Zak, 2018). Shockley-Zalabak et al. (2010) identified openness/honesty as one of the five key drivers of trust. The openness/honesty driver refers to the leadership's ability to communicate information to employees, provide honest evaluation feedback, and keep sensitive information confidential. Hurley's (2012) model identifies "communication" as a situational factor. According to this model, the frequency of honest communication affects the level of trust a trustor has in a trustee. Lastly, Zak's (2018) organizational trust model incorporates eight leadership practices associated with an increase in the brain chemical oxytocin and, hence, increased trust. One factor specifies leaders being honest and open in their communication with employees. Another factor Zak identified was the factor of acting

“natural”—that is, leaders behaving authentically and showing their honest selves to their employees.

**Competence.** The trustor’s perception of the trustee’s skills and competence is a significant factor across models of trust within organizations (Hurley, 2012; R. C. Mayer et al., 1995; Shockley-Zalabak et al., 2010). According to R. C. Mayer et al.’s (1995) model, the trustee’s skill level (“ability”) is a factor of perceived trustworthiness and influences the trustor’s level of trust. Shockley-Zalabak et al. (2010) also identified “competence” as a driver for trust. They described competence as the organization’s ability to meet its goals through leadership and collective employees’ skills. Within Hurley’s (2012) model, the perception of competence falls under the situational factor of “capability.”

**Integrity.** According to R. C. Mayer et al. (1995), “integrity” is the perception that a trustor acts by a set of principles similar to the trustee’s. Integrity is a concept identified within the R. C. Mayer et al. model, as well as a recurring factor in the other models (Hurley, 2012; R. C. Mayer et al., 1995; Shockley-Zalabak et al., 2010; Zak, 2018). Shockley-Zalabak et al. (2010) described this concept in their “identification” trust driver, which they defined as the personal connections between supervisors and employees resulting from their alignment with the organization’s core values. Hurley (2012) also referenced integrity in his model within the “similarities” element, which he identified as the commonalities between the trustor and trustee—to include core values.

### **Varying Levels of Trust**

Organizations seek a high level of trust, but trust is fragile and can fluctuate (Kramer & Cook, 2004). Varying levels of trust have been tied to multiple positive and negative organizational outcomes. According to Shockley-Zalabak et al. (2010, p. 16), “Trust is the

main thing for organizational excellence. . . . Trust is critical to bottom-line results, to how organization form themselves, to the quality of work effect, and to how organizations learn.” The literature has associated high levels of trust in supervisors with several positive benefits and has supported the opposite—showing that decreased trust in leaders has negative consequences for the organization.

**Benefits of trust.** High levels of trust in organizational leaders have been shown to increase job satisfaction and employee engagement (Knoll & Gill, 2011; Rich, 1997). Zak (2018) viewed organizational trust as a “valuable asset” that helps the organization maintain a “competitive advantage over rivals” (p. 55). Within the business realm, trust in a supervisor has been linked to increased productivity and sales (Davis, Schoorman, Mayer, & Tan, 2000; Rich, 1997), commitment to the organization (Mahajan, Bishop, & Scott, 2012), and retention of employees (Costigan, Iiter, & Berman, 1998; Davis et al., 2000). The perception of leader trustworthiness was correlated with voluntary acceptance of authority decisions (W. C. Kim & Mauborgne, 1993; Tyler & Degoe, 1996). Knoll and Gill (2011) also found possible connections between increased leadership trust and positive organizational climate.

**Broken trust.** Several factors could inhibit a leader’s ability to develop trust with staff. Hogan, Curphy, and Hogan (1994) posited that, in many situations, leaders are appointed based on their job knowledge rather than their interpersonal skills; their lack of social competency negatively affects their ability to build trust (Kramer & Cook, 2004, p. 34). Additional factors could include the nature of leading within a hierarchical organization. That is, given the authoritative nature of hierarchies, leaders may be put in situations where, to comply with their authorities, they must engage in behaviors that decrease trust with their subordinates (Dirks & Skarlicki, 2004).



Betrayal occurs when the trustor has expectations that the trustee will act a certain way and the trustee does not meet those expectations (Elangovan & Shapiro, 1998; Tschannen-Moran, 2014). *Betrayal* is defined “as a voluntary violation of mutually known pivotal expectations of the trustor by the trusted party (trustee), which has the potential to threaten the well-being of the trustor” (Elangovan & Shapiro, 1998, p. 548). Such a violation of expectations could be due to not wanting to conform to the trustor’s expectations or because the trustee gains something from this action. Nevertheless, betrayal damages trust and relationships (Tschannen-Moran, 2014).

Betrayal goes beyond a thought or idea; it is an action (Elangovan & Shapiro, 1998). Examples of betrayal include comments, actions, or decisions that are hurtful to the trustor and violate the trustor’s expectations of the trustee. Lying, not following through on promises, using one’s authority to threaten, speaking negatively about someone, and not taking ownership of actions or mistakes are additional behaviors that could be considered betrayal (Tschannen-Moran, 2014).

***Consequences of broken trust.*** Consequences of low or decreased trust in leaders also have been examined within the literature. Researchers have shown that, in contrast to the benefits of high trust levels, establishing and maintaining trust is difficult for organizations (Kramer & Cook, 2004). They correlated perceived lower levels of trust in organizational leaders with lower employee satisfaction (Shockley-Zalabak et al., 2010).

***Repairing trust.*** Once trust is broken, it has the potential to be repaired (Schweitzer, Hershey, & Bradlow, 2006; Tschannen-Moran, 2014). The process of regaining trust can be long and complex (Kutsyruba, Walker, & Noonan, 2011). The trustee apologizing and promising not to engage in the trust-violating behavior in the future supports the trust-

repairing process. However, most significant in trust restoration is the trustee engaging in trustworthy actions after the violation (Schweitzer et al., 2006). Often, the trust-repairing process begins with the person who was violated confronting the person who engaged in the trust-breaking action (Tschannen-Moran, 2014).

According to Tschannen-Moran (2014), the trust-restoring process involves the four “A”s: admit it, apologize, ask for forgiveness, and amend your ways (p. 224). In this process, the person who broke the trust first must admit that harm occurred due to his or her action and take responsibility for the violating behavior (*admit it*). The person who broke the trust must then apologize to the trustor, demonstrating remorse for the harm caused and the wish to redeem the other’s trust (*apologize*). *Asking forgiveness* involves the person who broke the trust asking the trustor to become vulnerable and begin to trust the trustee again. Lastly, *amend your ways* requires the trustee to demonstrate trustworthiness to the trustor through his or her actions over time (p. 288).

Specific to school leaders within organizations, Kutsyuruba, Walker, and Noonan (2011) considered it important for school leaders to understand the dynamics of trust, including the repair process. Within their roles, school principals often deal with situations where trust is broken; they have the responsibility to restore the breached trust, especially with the school’s stakeholders. In Kutsyuruba et al.’s study, principals identified trust-restoring factors as genuine care, authentic leadership, role-modeling (i.e., “walking the talk”), and transparent decision-making (p. 92). Other actions that restore trust include open and honest communication, integrity, reliability, respect, care, consistency, and credibility.

### **Trust Between Principals and Staff in Schools**

According to Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (1999), social context can influence the level of trust that occurs. This holds true especially for the school setting. The groups and friendships that develop among members of the school community can enhance and strengthen trust—or exacerbate the effects of a breach in a trusting relationship. When examining trust within the school setting, the impact of the social context must be considered.

R. C. Mayer et al. (1995) suggested that the nature of a trusting relationship as it manifests between two people within an organization is different from trust outside an organizational setting. Cummings and Bromiley (1996, p. 302) defined “organizational trust” as “the degree of trust between units of an organization or between organizations.” Using that definition, “organizational trust” could describe trust as it manifests in schools. Several “units” (p. 302), including principals and staff, exist within schools, and the principals play a key role in developing trust among units in educational settings (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015).

#### **Principals’ Role in Developing Trust**

According to Day (2009), establishing and sustaining conditions for trust within schools are the principals’ responsibility. School leaders who are trusted by their staff are in a better position to accomplish the goal of educating all students. Researchers have found positive correlations between faculty trust of the principal and student achievement and some aspects of school climate, such as academic press (holding high academic standards), teacher professionalism, and community engagement (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). High

levels of trust in the principal has been correlated with better working relationships for solving problems and creating solutions (Tschannen-Moran, 2014).

Faculty base their trust judgements on direct observations of the principals' actions (Handford & Leithwood, 2013). Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (1999) conducted a research study of 2,741 participants and examined faculty trust in school leadership and colleagues within 86 middle schools. Participants completed two scales measuring levels of trust in their principals' and colleagues' behaviors. Results of this study suggested that faculty trust of the principals directly relates to the principals' behaviors. Thus, principals can influence their staff's trust level through their actions. That study also suggested the principals' behaviors do not have an impact on trust among other members of the organization. It identified a number of school-leader characteristics that positively correlated with trust, including leader "authenticity" (acting in accordance with one's genuine self) and "openness" (sharing personal information with others).

Tschannen-Moran and Gareis's (2015) results also suggested principals' behaviors influenced faculty trust and that this trust had two equally important components. The first is *interpersonal orientation*, in which principals demonstrate openness and benevolence in their interactions with staff. The second component, *task orientation*, involves staff perceiving principals as competent and reliable to accomplish tasks. To maximize trust, school leaders must demonstrate both orientations.

### **Specific School-Leader Behaviors Associated with Building Trust**

Principals and educators engage in varying levels of trust due to their interdependence and interactions around shared goals (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). Most existing literature on school leaders' trust-building behavior refers to a framework Hoy and Tschannen-Moran

(1999) created. Hoy and Tschannen-Moran synthesized the existing literature on trust-building behaviors and extrapolated common elements, which they named “the five faces of trust.” The concept of vulnerability underlies this framework.

As previously discussed, the literature has portrayed trust as multifaceted and with numerous definitions (e.g., Hosmer, 1995; Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999; R. C. Mayer et al., 1995; Rousseau et al., 1998). Despite the discrepant meanings and models that exist, all contain one commonality: Trust involves a willingness to be vulnerable to another party. When one individual trusts another, a level of risk exists. That risk level depends on the degree of confidence the trustor has in the trustee (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999).

According to Tschannen-Moran (2014), trust is important because it allows people to accomplish many things that they would not be able to do by themselves. Although such dependence creates risk and vulnerability, it also allows individuals to complete activities they would not be able to without others. In this ever changing, complex world, people are required to rely on others more readily than ever before. For example, individuals with school-age children depend on the school to educate their children. Due to this dependence, parents must trust that the school will keep their children safe. Because safety is not something that schools can guarantee, parents must be vulnerable and engage in a level of trust with school personnel.

According to Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2015), school members work interdependently to accomplish goals. Vulnerability occurs due to this interdependence and reliance on other people to accomplish joint organizational goals. However, a level of risk is associated with uncertainty the other person will act as expected. That is, the risk occurs because there is a potential for betrayal or harm that the trustor cannot control.

Within schools, vulnerability occurs mutually between the principal and the school staff. Staff are vulnerable to the principals' actions and decisions, and the principals demonstrate some vulnerability by sharing leadership and personal information when developing trust with staff. This risk and vulnerability underlie the "five faces of trust" (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). The following sections describe Tschannen-Moran and Hoy's (1999) five faces of trust and the principals' corresponding actions within each category.

**Benevolence.** Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999, p. 187) defined *benevolence* as "the confidence that one's well-being or something one cares about will be protected by the trusted person or group." This concept describes the trustee as acting in the best interest of others. Later, Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2015) referred to benevolence as the "starting point" from which trust can develop. It also has been described as the "most essential ingredient" related to trust (Tschannen-Moran, 2014, p. 21). Benevolence requires the person who is trusting to believe the person being trusted will not betray or take advantage of them. Instead, trustors assume the opposite—that trustees will act in the trustors' best interests (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999; Tschannen-Moran, 2014). When a trustee is not perceived as benevolent, the trustor spends time and energy thinking about alternative plans in case of betrayal (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). The trustor's beliefs are based on judgements of the trustee's behaviors through interactions over time (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015).

According to Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2015), principals build trust with their staff through benevolent actions, such as demonstrating empathy for and understanding of their employees' needs, getting to know employees' personal interests and hobbies, and expressing appreciation for the employees' work (Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Tschannen-

Moran & Gareis, 2015). By interacting with and around staff and protecting their employees' rights or standing up for their employees' best interests, principals allow their staff to develop a belief the principals will protect them from harm. Principals who are viewed as benevolent demonstrate acting in the employees' best interest rather than for personal gain (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). When staff trust their school leaders because of their benevolent actions, they are more motivated, accomplish more, and are more likely to accept correction (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). These authentic interactions lay the foundation for trust to develop (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015).

When school leaders do not act in staff's best interest or have harmed school members through their actions, staff become fearful. This fear causes anxious feelings of possible betrayal. As a result, staff consume time and energy processing these thoughts and emotions, which ultimately decreases their productivity (Tschannen-Moran, 2014).

Day (2009) conducted a study that examined one secondary school principal from England on his journey to establish and sustain a successful school characterized by high performance on the national assessment. Using a qualitative design, Day collected data over a 6-year period from a variety of sources offering multiple perspectives. Results suggested an important aspect of faculty trust in the principal involves the faculty inferring that the principal cared about them and their colleagues. The principal in the study developed structures for individual and collective leadership that demonstrated he valued the educators' skills and opinions. Through multiple inquiries, the researchers heard many reports from staff that the principal took an interest in their professional and personal lives and modeled his caring and ethical behavior in his interactions. The staff perceived these actions as trustworthy and thus increased their trust in the principal.

**Reliability.** The second face of trust Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999) identified is the concept of *reliability*. Reliability is predictability of actions—that trustees will accomplish what they said they would or what is necessary. Hoy and Tschannen-Moran combined predictability with benevolence to describe reliability. To develop trust, an individual must act predictably. However, consistent action alone is not enough. The trustee also must demonstrate through predictable actions that their intentions in the actions are in the best interest of the trustor. Like benevolence, the demonstration of reliability occurs over time and is based on judgements the trustor makes regarding the trustee’s actions. Reliability is grounded in the trustor’s belief that the trustee will follow through on commitments and decisions (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999; Tschannen-Moran, 2014).

Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2015) suggested that principals build trust with their staff by consistently demonstrating reliability. When reliability is high, staff do not question or wonder whether a principal will follow through on a decision or promise, because the principal consistently has done what is expected of him or her. The staff’s strong belief in the principal’s predictability and benevolence allows trust to flourish. Tschannen-Moran and Gareis also described principals’ behaviors that foster a sense of reliability as interpreted by their staff. These behaviors include making timely decisions, following through on decisions with actions, listening to the staff’s concerns, and taking corrective action. Through reliability behaviors, principals can develop and maintain their staff’s trust. Tschannen-Moran and Gareis also stated that, like benevolence, reliability must be present with the other identified faces of trust.

Handford and Leithwood (2013) conducted a study to examine teachers’ perceptions of principals’ trustworthiness behaviors. Through interviews with 24 teachers, they identified



several behaviors as trustworthy. Their results showed a number of principals' behaviors related to the category of "consistency and reliability" and were associated with predictable patterns of the leader's actions. These behaviors included timely feedback on instructional practices, consistent discipline routines, and frequent involvement with staff and students. Predictably praising staff and regularly using data to drive decisions were also reported as trustworthy behaviors of principals.

**Competence.** The third face of trust is *competence* (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999). Competence has been described as "the ability to perform a task as expected, according to an appropriate standard" (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015, p. 262). As applied to schools, it involves the staff's belief that the principals have the necessary skill set and have consistently demonstrated their abilities over time or through reputation. Thus, predictability and benevolence in action is not enough to develop trust; the individual also must demonstrate their skill set to the trustor (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999).

According to Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2015), the belief that a principal is competent is essential for trust to be developed and maintained. School staff depend on the principal to accomplish a broad and complex set of objectives. One major expectation of the principal is accomplishing school goals associated with teaching and student learning (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015).

Within the Handford and Leithwood (2013) study that examined teachers' perceptions of principals' behaviors of trustworthiness, the most frequently reported trustworthy behaviors were categorized in the area of "competence" and referred to as "work-related skills" (p. 202). These behaviors include the principal being visible around the school, interacting within classrooms frequently, and guiding and providing feedback on

instructional planning and instruction. The principal's ability to provide professional development opportunities to their staff, as well as their propensity to be involved with school initiatives, were perceived as trustworthy behaviors. Solving problems and creating and carrying out adaptive solutions, as well as engaging teachers in the principal's complex role, also were reported as behaviors that contribute to developing trust with staff. In Handford and Leithwood's study, teachers reported that they viewed principals who demonstrated their knowledge through interactions with the school environment as trustworthy.

**Honesty.** Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2015, p. 260) described *honesty* as “anchored in moral principles and . . . cultivated through behaviors that demonstrate integrity of character, authenticity, and accountability for one's actions.” Honesty involves making truthful statements, keeping promises, and owning mistakes. Tschannen-Moran (2014) discussed the component of *integrity* as the individuals having a correspondence between their words and their actions. An individual's character can be judged by his or words, which demonstrate a set of values. Thus, when the words do not match the actions, a trustor will not feel confident in predicting a trustee's future actions. *Authenticity* is another component of honesty. It can be characterized by showing one's true self and taking responsibilities for one's mistakes. As with the other four faces, a trustor judges a trustee's honesty based on interactions with the trustee over time and focuses on the trustee's words matching his or her actions (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999).

To develop and maintain trust with their staff, principals must demonstrate their honesty through actions and behaviors. It is especially important for principals to be truthful and match their statements with their leadership actions because that is how they demonstrate

their values. They also frequently use communication as a collaborative tool to accomplish school goals. If a principal is perceived as dishonest, the staff will not believe what the principal says, and their trust in the principal decreases (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015).

According to Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2015), principals engage in various actions that demonstrate honesty to their staff. They take responsibility for their mistakes and treat all staff members with respect but do not use their authority to manipulate people. By sharing non-school-related information about themselves, principals show their authenticity, which leads to increased staff trust. In addition, demonstrating consistency between words and actions is important for a principal's perceived honesty. For example, to develop trust during change initiatives, staff need to observe the principal acting in a way that supports the initiative. If the principal does not, then the staff's trust in both the principal and their commitment to the initiative will decrease (Tschannen-Moran, 2014).

Although Handford and Leithwood (2013) did not use the term *honesty* as a category to describe teacher-perceived principal behaviors, they identified several behaviors that fall within this category and labeled the category "integrity" (p. 206). These behaviors include the principals matching their words with their actions, being honest with their speech, and modeling behaviors. Principals demonstrate their character and values through their words and actions; this "moral-ethical orientation" (p. 207) relates to how staff perceive their trustworthiness.

**Openness.** According to Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999, p. 188), openness is "a process by which individuals make themselves vulnerable by sharing information with others." It is grounded in the belief that relevant information will be shared and not withheld.

Further, there is reciprocal confidence between the trustor and the trustee that the information will not be exploited.

According to Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2015), a principal's abilities to be open and to demonstrate that openness affect the staff's trust. Staff view principals who readily share relevant information as *open*. Other behaviors that demonstrate principals' openness include explaining their actions or decisions, giving staff timely and constructive feedback, and allowing staff to share in school decision-making. Sharing leadership opportunities and delegating tasks to staff can increase the staff's compliance and their view of the principal as approachable.

Handford and Leithwood's (2013) study identified that many teachers perceived principals' practices that fell into the category of "openness" (p. 205). These practices include the principal sharing relevant information with staff and school community members and allowing staff to choose areas of professional development for themselves. Like Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2015), Handford and Leithwood (2013) identified involving staff in school decision-making and allowing shared leadership opportunities as additional trustworthy behaviors in the openness category. They showed that teachers viewed these behaviors as recognition of teachers' skill, as appreciation of teachers' contributions, and as giving teachers a voice within the school.

### **Factors that Influence School Leaders' Trust-Building Behavior**

This section presents a synthesis of the literature, organized by categories, describing factors that emerged as influencing school leaders trust-building behaviors. Some factors listed are cognitive influences that occur within the individual; others are external influences. Principals are influenced by their professional identities, emotional intelligence, and

reflective practice. These cognitive practices are shaped through experiences and core beliefs. The literature reported other influences on school leaders' behaviors as their engagement in principal's preparation and training programs and their administrative evaluations.

**Professional identities.** According to Scribner and Crow (2012, p. 246), professional identities are “identities which individuals use to make sense of and enact roles.” Professional identities go beyond the role of a leader. They tap into an individual's beliefs and core values. Along with these beliefs, the social context in which the individual functions also plays a role. These beliefs and social influences reflect in the leader's actions (Crow & Møller, 2017).

Identity formation is not a fixed process; rather, it is fluid and ever changing (Crow & Møller, 2017). It is not a one-time occurrence; it changes and evolves over time (Tubin, 2017). Thus, school-leader identity development is shaped through engaging in and then reflecting on related experiences (Robertson, 2017; Tubin, 2017).

**Sources and emergence.** According to Gronn (2003, p. 133), in the past, leaders' identities were classified as either “task-oriented” or “person-oriented.” Within these classifications, *task-oriented leaders* focus their leadership beliefs and efforts toward accomplishing tasks, whereas *person-oriented leaders* focus their values and actions around interpersonal relationships. However, current thought on leaders' professional identities has evolved to a more comprehensive view that includes characteristics of both orientations.

Crow and Møller (2017) used Crow, Day, and Møller's (2017) framework to conceptualize how identity develops for school leaders. Their framework includes five dimensions: narrative, epistemic, emotional, historical and cultural, and political. On a

*narrative* level, school leaders reflect on their beliefs to develop stories about themselves. These stories—how they view themselves—are ever changing with their experiences and social contexts. The *epistemic* dimension involves reflecting on the acquisition of knowledge within their field, as well as the decisions they have made and their reasoning, to reach these judgements. The *emotional* dimension involves working with others and developing relationships within the work context. *Historical and cultural* influences also are present in shaping an individual's professional identity. These influences include socially acceptable behaviors, common educational patterns, and past and current educational reforms. Lastly, *political* and governmental influences affect the individual's professional identity formation because these sources dictate many of the required occurrences within schools.

Robertson (2017) provided additional evidence of the important role cognition has on identity formation. Robertson used Burke and Stets's (2009) framework to analyze a case-study experience of a veteran principal in New Zealand. Robertson found that the participant's reflections on his family and early experiences, his thinking patterns, and his actions and emotions in response to challenges influenced his professional identity. This reflection process was continual; thus, individuals' professional identities are reshaped and adjusted.

Additional influences on school leaders' development of their professional identities were examined in Notman's (2017) study of two early-career principals. The study identified factors that influenced professional identity development as they emerged within the participants' first year of principalship, including early life experiences and family background, early leadership experiences, self-identified leadership style, and new experiences with managing change.

***Evolution.*** Principals' professional identities change over time as they adapt to new situations (Burke, 2006). Change catalyzes this transformation and evolution (Day, 2009). Veteran principals continuously transform their professional identities as they engage in their roles over time. This change requires reflection and adjustment in the areas of collaboration, decision-making, and management of their emotions (Robertson, 2017).

Tubin (2017) used secondary case-study data from four Israeli school principals to identify leadership practices that affected the evolution of their professional identities. By analyzing this data, Tubin found that beliefs and core values influence an individual's identity with regard to their views on fit (i.e., how well positions align with the individual's goals), links (i.e., meaningful relationships with staff based on shared experiences), and sacrifice (i.e., changing relationships due to accepting hierarchical leadership positions).

***Gender differences and professional identity development.*** Gender inequality exists within school administration, especially at the secondary level, which has a significantly larger male presence (Coleman, 2005; Murakami & Törnsen, 2017). Female school leaders still face the challenges of stereotypes and negative views of women (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016; Smith, 2011).

According to Murakami and Törnsen (2017), these factors play a role in the development and evolution of their professional identities. To illustrate, female principals have reported changing their authentic and genuine leadership practices to demonstrate what traditionally have been regarded as male qualities and to act in an authoritative style. This change in their identity is rooted in perpetual, culturally based, gender biases. In Murakami and Törnsen's study of two secondary education female principals from Sweden and the

United States, both participants reported being aware of the low number of females in school leadership and the negative stigma that surrounds their gender in these positions.

**Reflective practice.** Tschannen-Moran (2014) stated that for school leaders to engage in trustworthy leadership, they must regularly reflect on their actions. She suggested principals use the STOP protocol (Gallwey, 2000, as cited in Tschannen-Moran, 2014). This protocol facilitates an individual through a reflection process by engaging them in the steps of: Step back, Think, and Organize their thoughts before Proceeding (p. 257). Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner (2007, p. 174) identified the concept of “reflection-on-action,” which they described as thinking about situations after they occur to identify ways to improve practice. This concept, at the heart of reflective practice, can occur frequently and affect school leaders’ behaviors.

Dewey’s (1938/1997) principle of “continuity of experience” (p. 35) suggested that individuals’ pasts shape how they experience subsequent occurrences—that is, peoples’ past experiences affect how they make sense of new experiences. Thus, not only how individuals experience something in the moment, but also their past experiences influence, their narratives and stories. Leaders’ reflections and cognitions affect how they act.

Citing Dewey’s (1938/1997) ideas on the impact of experience on behavior, Clandinin and Connelly (2000, p. 50) identified the four ways individuals experience situations as “inward, outward, backward, and forward.” That is, people experience a situation internally and cognitively (inward), relative to the world around them (outward), and in line with the impact of past, present, and future experiences within the reported story (backward and forward). All experiences occur in all four ways.



**Emotional intelligence.** School leaders are influenced by their emotional intelligence and social-emotional competencies, and their trust-building actions can be examined in this context (CASEL, 2019; Gardner, 1983; Goleman, 1995; J. D. Mayer, Caruso, & Salovey, 1999; Roberts & Lipnevich, 2012). The conceptual frameworks of emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995; J. D. Mayer et al., 1999), multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1983), and social-emotional competencies (CASEL, 2019) can be applied to identify, understand, and demonstrate skills that help develop trust with others.

Although various definitions of “emotional intelligence” exist in the literature, the American Psychological Association (2017) defined this construct as a type of intelligence defined as the abilities to perceive, appraise, and express emotions accurately and appropriately, to use emotions to facilitate thinking, to understand and analyze emotions, to use emotional knowledge effectively, and to regulate one’s emotions to promote both emotional and intellectual growth. (para. 10)

Salovey and Mayer first introduced the concept of emotional intelligence in 1980 (J. D. Mayer et al., 1999), but the model Goleman (1995) developed is most widely known. The emergence of several other theorists and models supports the importance of emotional intelligence for positive individual and leadership outcomes.

Gardner’s (1983) model of multiple intelligences provided connections to individuals’ ability to identify vulnerability within themselves and others, as well as their ability to use this identification to develop trust through interpersonal interactions. Gardner’s model goes beyond the traditional notion of a single intelligence; it includes nine intelligences, of which Gardner identified two, *interpersonal* and *intrapersonal*, as heavily

influencing an individual's ability to process experiences and build trust (Roberts & Lipnevich, 2012). According to Gardner (1983), *interpersonal* intelligence is the ability to understand and relate to others, whereas *intrapersonal* intelligence is the ability to understand the self and reflect on experiences.

The Collaborative for Academic Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2019) developed a model of social-emotional learning similar to the intelligence theories. CASEL is a leading organization in research, policy, and practice focused on promoting social-emotional learning within educational settings. They described self-awareness and social awareness as capacities that could aid leaders in building trust within their organizations. These capacities of reflection (previously discussed), self-awareness, and social awareness can be linked to a leader's ability to effectively build trust with their staff, as well as to understand when that trust is broken and how to repair it. Thus, the concepts of self-awareness and social awareness are described within the context of these models.

***Self-awareness.*** According to the Oxford Dictionary (Self-awareness, n.d.), self-awareness is “conscious knowledge of one's own character, feelings, motives, and desires.” In the realm of emotional intelligence, Goleman's (1995) theory and J. D. Mayer, Caruso, and Salovey's (1999) model acknowledged self-awareness as a part of emotional intelligence. Within Goleman's (1995) five-part model, he acknowledged one part as self-awareness and described it as an individual's ability to know and understand his or her own emotions. This also includes accurately identifying his or her strengths and weaknesses (Goleman, 2005). J. D. Mayer et al.'s (1999) model of emotional intelligence also addressed aspects of self-awareness. They noted that emotional intelligence involves managing and

regulating one's emotions, using emotions to facilitate thought, and perceiving emotions in self (Brackett & Salovey, 2006).

From the perspective of multiple intelligences, Gardner (1983) also acknowledged the importance of self-awareness in his description of intrapersonal intelligence. Using Gardner's model, Roberts and Lipnevich (2012, p. 43) described intrapersonal intelligence as individuals' ability to understand their thoughts and actions involving reflection and as key to identify change to better themselves. This intelligence directly relates to an individual's ability to understand what makes him or her vulnerable, process this emotional knowledge, and use the experience to build trust with others.

In similar context, CASEL's (2019) description of social-emotional competencies also suggested the importance of self-awareness. Two of the five social-emotional competencies they proposed directly relate to self-awareness. Specifically, the "self-awareness" (para. 2) competency relates to accurately identifying and perceiving emotions, behaviors, and capacities in oneself. The "self-management" (para. 3) competency also has a close connection to the concept of self-awareness. According to CASEL, self-management is the ability to regulate one's emotions. This skill requires an individual first to be self-aware of his or her emotions before engaging in regulation of them.

***Social awareness.*** As with self-awareness, the literature on intelligences and social-emotional competencies pervasively referred to the social-awareness concept. "Social awareness" (CASEL, 2019, para. 4) can be described as the ability to understand others' perspectives and use the knowledge to engage in action.

Goleman (2005) described two skills directly related to social awareness: social skill and empathy. Within the context of Goleman's emotional intelligence model, social skills

can be described as identifying and acting on others' emotions, and the capacity of empathy encompasses understanding how others feel and why they engage in certain behaviors.

Similarly, J. D. Mayer et al.'s (1999) model of emotional intelligence references understanding emotions within the context of relationships and perceiving emotions in others (Brackett & Salovey, 2006).

Gardner's (1983) concept of interpersonal intelligence also plays a role in the social process of vulnerability. The hallmark of interpersonal intelligence is the ability to understand others, which requires the capacities of empathy, perspective taking, and understanding others' thoughts and actions (Roberts & Lipnevich, 2012). To demonstrate vulnerability as a means of developing trust, an individual must have a solid understanding of others and the capacity to know when, where, and how to demonstrate vulnerability in the trust-building process.

This concept echoes in CASEL's (2019, para. 4) recognition of "social awareness" (para. 4) as a competency and its description as one's ability to take the perspective of others. Closely related to this capacity are "relationship skills" (para. 5), described as one's ability to successfully navigate social interactions through effective communication and appropriate social behavior and to build relationships with others. The ability to be socially aware aids an individual in developing and maintaining these interpersonal relationships.

When viewing trust-building as comprised of an individual's social-emotional capacity, the models of emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995; J. D. Mayer et al., 1999), multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1983), and social-emotional competencies (CASEL, 2019) provide frameworks for describing the concepts of self-awareness and social awareness. A leader's ability to understand his or her emotional state (self-awareness) and the feelings and

perspectives of others (social awareness) relate to the individual's ability to be vulnerable and develop connections with followers (Goleman, 2005).

**Administrative training and preparation.** The type of training and preparation for the principal role affects principals' trust-building behavior. For instance, where and how individuals obtained their principal licensure significantly shapes how they perceive the quality of their training (Militello, Gajda, & Bowers, 2009). According to Perez, Uline, Johnson, James-Ward, and Basom (2011), field experience is the most impactful element in preparing principals for their role. Through this experience-based learning, the school leaders in the Perez et al. study developed a deeper understanding of their role in building teacher and leader capacity and fostering collaboration with and among staff, as well as of their function in developing relationships and trust with school members. Dodson (2015) echoed the influential nature of field experiences and called for increased field-experience hours for all principals in training to gain the skills necessary to be effective in independent practice.

The State of Massachusetts, for example, offers three possible paths to obtain licensure as a school administrator (Massachusetts' Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, n.d.-a). Currently, all three paths require completion of the Massachusetts Performance Assessment for Leaders.

Although all licensure routes involve education and experience within the principal or assistant principal roles, there is a discrepancy between how individuals are trained and their multifaceted practice as principals (Gentilucci et al., 2013). In their study, Gentilucci, Denti, and Guaglianone (2013) interviewed 11 new-to-the-position principals about their initial perspectives of their new role, the most challenging aspects of that role, and how their perspectives changed over time. The new principals reported challenges with "soft skills"

(p. 84), including building relationships and trust with their staff. Results of that study support a greater focus in principal-preparation programs on developing relationship-building skills.

Gender differences also play a role in leader training and preparation. Gronn (2003) suggested that leadership-training programs cannot implement a one-size-fits-all approach. Rather, they must take into account the individual's professional identity, including gender, race, location, and educational policy (Crow & Møller, 2017; Gronn, 2003).

**Evaluation.** Competencies related to trust-building are addressed in school leaders' state mandated evaluations and play a role in the professional growth of principals. For example, according to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (n.d.-a) website, the educator evaluation process "is designed to support and promote educators' continuous growth and professional learning." In Massachusetts, typically district-level employees (e.g., superintendent or assistant superintendent) evaluate the principals.

Principals are rated in four areas identified by the Professional Standards for Administrative Leadership: instructional leadership, management and operations, family and community engagement, and professional culture. Of those four standards, *professional culture* indicators align closest to measuring the principals' ability to engage in behaviors that develop trust with their staff. For example, principals are rated on their ability to communicate consistently and clearly in a variety of forms, including verbal and written. This standard (Standard IV-c-I) also includes the principals' ability to communicate their rationale and goals to their staff. Additionally, administrators are evaluated on their ability to

generate and communicate their shared vision to all stakeholders. Other than these indicators, principals are not evaluated on trust-building behaviors.

### **Chapter Summary**

The literature presented in this chapter provides the knowledge base in which this dissertation study is rooted. General information presented on trust and trust within organizations includes portrayals of trust, models, and their impacts. This chapter also discussed principals' roles and behaviors that influence trust through Hoy and Tschannen-Moran's (1999) "five faces of trust" framework, as well as factors that affect school leaders' trust-building behaviors.

Understanding the experiences of principals as they develop their views on trust within schools, as well as the actions they perceive as building trust, requires further investigation. This study examines principals' experiences and identifies their behaviors that affect trust. Such information can help principals and stakeholders better understand trust as it manifests within schools. In addition, it can help identify new skills and knowledge principals need to develop trust with their staff. The next chapter provides information on the method and procedures of this study.

## **CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to examine the stories narrated by seven elementary school principals about experiences that shaped their views on trust and their understandings of building trust with their staffs. The research questions concerned their experiences on the importance of trust within schools, turning-point experiences that affected their understanding of beliefs, and trust-building actions in which they engaged or they observed that supported or diminished trust with their staff. This study aimed to answer those guiding research questions through an analysis of participants' narrative accounts. This chapter addresses the study's orientation, the researcher's role, participants, ethical considerations, and data collection and analysis.

### **Orientation and Rationale of Study**

Research on educational settings has established trust within schools as beneficial and necessary but also referred to it as multifaceted and complex. One component of trust within schools is the trust that manifests between administrators and staff. Little research exists related to principals' trust-building actions, and far less exists about trust from the school leaders' perspectives. Nevertheless, the literature has established the impactful role that experiences have on an individual's perceptions and actions. Thus, this study helps fill the gap in the literature concerning principals' experiences with trust.

Specifically, using a qualitative method that was narrative in nature, this research examined the interaction of experiences on elementary school principals' understanding of the importance of and their role in trust within the school. Creswell (2013) described qualitative research as



an inquiry process of understanding based on a distinct methodological approach to inquiry that explores a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture; analyzes words; reports detailed views of participants; and conducts the study in a natural setting. (p. 300)

The qualitative methodological approach best suited to examining the participants' stories and experiences in this study was narrative inquiry. Although the narrative approach has been interpreted several ways, this study was based on Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) description of the narrative approach as examining individuals' experiences. They based their definition of narrative research heavily on how experiences influence individuals' interpretations of their current situations, citing Dewey's principle of "continuity of experience" (p. 35). Thus, they grounded their approach in how people internalize and make sense of their experiences, and so it greatly influenced by the participants' social contexts and interpretations of their experiences. Within this type of research, an individual's reporting of their stories reveals those experiences. Then, those stories can be analyzed to obtain a holistic view of characters, place, time, and interactions with others.

This study explored the stories and experiences of seven elementary school principals. The research questions guided the researcher's selection of the narrative approach. This approach allowed the researcher to gather the participants' stories to identify what experiences shaped their views on the importance of trust and trust-building with their staff, as well as the experiences that have promoted and diminished trust. It also examined the social context of these experiences and how they shaped the stories participants reported.

### **Role of the Researcher**

I chose narrative research to obtain the stories of principals regarding how they developed an understanding of the importance of trust and their experiences with trust-building practice. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) reported that narrative researchers live their own stories, bringing their own past, present, and future to the research in which they engage. A researcher's experiences influence the researcher to engage in this type of research.

The importance of trust within schools was initially brought to my attention through my graduate studies, particularly after becoming aware of the role trust plays in school improvement (Bryk et al., 2009). Further research related to transformational and authentic leadership led me to reflect on what trust looks like in my life. In retrospect, trusting relationships from the time of being a child until my current self have shaped and even changed my life trajectory. Through this reflection, the idea of trust transformed from a concept in a book to understanding its powerful impact.

My understanding of the importance of trust began with significant relationships with my parents, coaches, and educators. I believed these individuals had my best interest in mind and were guiding me in personal and professional growth. These interactions inspired me to make life choices in which I could form positive trusting relationships with others, including my engagement as a school psychologist and athletic coach. They continued to shape my aspiration to become a principal.

Through these significant experiences, I reached an understanding of the importance of trust, especially in leadership and mentorship positions. This sparked an inquiry into others' journeys to understanding this concept. Along with my desire to become a principal, understanding principals' journeys was especially important because they have opportunities

to influence many children and adults. With developing an understanding rooted in an individual's experience, I wondered what could be learned from individuals who had varied experiences and lessons pertinent to trust within schools.

My past experiences with trusting relationships have led me to want to pursue narrative research. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) stated that researchers subconsciously bring their own experiences and stories to the research. This research brought my experiences as I engaged in this research study. Narrative researchers do not just record others' stories; they also are involved by making meaning of those stories through the research process. Thus, they become a part of the experience being examined (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Fraser, 2004).

This awareness and acknowledgement allowed me to remove my subjectivity to the greatest extent possible during the data collection and analysis. Within narrative methodology, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) cautioned researchers to be aware of how they ask questions and give verbal and nonverbal responses because these can influence what and how participants share their stories. Given this awareness, I was conscious of the need to read questions verbatim from the interview protocol and aware of leading participants' answers through prompting. Thus, all participants received the same set of questions from the interview protocol. Using the probes, I asked them to elaborate on how they experienced the situation inward, outward, backward, and forward. I attempted to obtain this information for all stories shared throughout the interviews.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) also cautioned researchers to be aware of the impact of the interview setting (e.g., place), which also can influence what participants share. Thus,

the interviews for this study were conducted at the participating principals' schools to maintain a comfortable but professional and confidential atmosphere.

I was also cognizant of the need to avoid dominating the interview time, and thus allowed the participants to share their stories freely. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) described this as a balance of equality between the researcher and participant within the interview setting. The open-ended interview questions allowed the participants to share their stories with minimal interruption. I used probing questions to extract additional and more-detailed information. I made the purpose of the interview clear to the participants at the beginning of each interview session. Although participants used conversational language, all interviews were formal, and participants did not need to be reminded of the formality of the interview during the procedures.

### **Participants**

I used purposeful sampling techniques to select individuals to participate in this study. Consistent with narrative research, purposeful sampling allowed me to focus on specific individuals who could provide insightful information regarding specific experiences (Creswell, 2013). Participants were elementary school principals with at least 3 years of experience in that position and practicing within the MetroWest area of Massachusetts. Purposeful sampling was appropriate for this narrative research because it provided the opportunity to gather stories told by the sampled population to answer the guiding research questions.

### **Delimitations**

Participation in this study was limited to practicing elementary school principals currently working in schools with a combination of grades from Pre-Kindergarten through

Grade 5. This criterion allowed comparison among individuals engaging in the same role. Participants must have had at least 3 years of experience as a principal. The setting was restricted to elementary schools within the Massachusetts MetroWest area. Data were collected through interviews to gather principals' self-reports. However, no data were collected to verify accuracy or effectiveness of the trust-building practices they reported. Given this study's small sample size, findings cannot be generalized to principals in other contexts.

### **Pilot Interview Participants**

I recruited five individuals via email for an interview pilot. Pilot participants were five current and former elementary school principals who were ineligible to participate in the primary study due to earlier professional connections with me. Prior to the pilot (through the initial email) and again verbally at the interview session, I informed the participants of the purpose of the study and confidentiality procedures, as well as information on their participation. All agreed to participate and signed informed consent forms (Appendix D). The pilot interviews were conducted at the participants' school or administrative buildings.

### **Primary Study Participants**

I then solicited participants for the primary study through an email invitation. The email addresses of all (55) elementary school principals within the MetroWest area were obtained via the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's (n.d.-b) website. This recruitment email contained information about the study and criteria to participate and requested their participation (Appendix B). It asked principals interested in being considered for the study to provide basic information, such as their names, school districts, gender, and years of experience as a principal via a link within the contacting email.

This information was collected via a Google Form and used to confirm their eligibility and for further contact with the prospective participants.

Seven elementary school principals expressed interest in participating and responded with contact information to this email. All seven met the study criteria and subsequently engaged in interviews at their school sites. Table 1 shows the participants' basic demographic information at the time of the interviews.

Table 1. *Participant Information*

Name	Gender	Type of school district	Current grades serviced <sup>a</sup>	Years' experience (as principal)
Rachel	Female	Urban	K–2	9
Mark	Male	Urban	K–4	7
John	Male	Suburban	3–5	6
Lindsey	Female	Suburban	K–4	10
Sean	Male	Suburban	PreK–1	5
Stephanie	Female	Urban	K–5	12
Brenda	Female	Suburban	K–4	7

*Note.*  $N = 7$ . <sup>a</sup>K = Kindergarten.

Interviews were scheduled via email and conducted at the participants' schools. Along with the information provided in the initial email, the participants were informed of the purpose of the study and confidentiality of information verbally and through the written letter of consent (Appendix D) prior to beginning the interview. They were given multiple

opportunities to ask questions. All participants signed informed consent forms at the start of the interview session and received a gift card prior to beginning the first interview as a symbol of thanks for their participation in the study. I assigned each participant a pseudonym (e.g., as used in Table 1) to provide anonymity. All participants agreed to be available for follow-up contact if questions arose or I needed additional information.

### **Data Collection**

This section explains the instrumentation, pilot procedures, and data collection procedures. It also describes the connection between the study's guiding questions and the interview protocol.

#### **Instrumentation**

Narrative research seeks to examine comprehensive stories of participants concerning a particular occurrence (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Riessman, 2005). The data-collection instrument and procedures were designed to gather the participants' stories about their experiences of how they came to understand trust within schools and their experiences building trust with their staff. I developed an interview protocol to focus on the study's guiding questions with open-ended questions to allow participants to share unrestricted accounts (Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2016; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Creswell, 2013). I was guided by Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) reference to Dewey's idea that individuals experience situations in four ways: inward, outward, backward, and forward (p. 50). *Inward* refers to how individuals experience a situation on a cognitive level. *Outward* describes how individuals experience the world around them. *Backward* and *forward* address the impact of past, present, and future experiences within the reported story.

All experiences occur in all four ways. I used prompts within the interview protocol to inquire how the participant experienced these aspects within their stories. For example, to gather information on how a participant experienced a situation *Inward*, I used the probe, “Can you tell me about your thought process?” To gather information on how a participant experienced a situation *Backward*, I used the prompt, “Was this impacted by a past experience?” Table A1 contains a complete list of possible probes used during the interview process. Consistent with the narrative method, these factors supported me in gathering comprehensive accounts of principals’ stories.

The protocol originally contained seven broad, open-ended questions with multiple possible probes and follow-up questions. Several revisions of the interview protocol occurred because of piloting the instrument (e.g., clarification of wording in several questions and the order of the questions).

The final interview protocol (Appendix A) was developed and used during the study’s interviews. It contained 13 open-ended questions. As depicted in Table 2, the interview questions aligned with the study’s guiding questions.



Table 2. *Correlation of Guiding Research Questions to Interview Questions*

Research question	Interview question
Background information (not a guiding question)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Please tell me about your pathway to principalship.</li> <li>• Please describe your philosophy on leading a school.</li> </ul>
1. What experiences have shaped elementary school principals' views on the importance of trust within schools?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Within a school setting, the concept of trust means different things to different people. What does trust mean to you?</li> <li>• What ways that trust influences the functioning of schools?</li> </ul>
2. What do elementary school principals report as turning-point experiences that influenced their understanding of beliefs and actions with regard to building trust with their staff?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Please tell me about an "Aha!" or influential moment as you learned about the importance of trust within schools. Follow up: Why was this particularly influential?</li> <li>• What do you believe is the principal's role in building trust with his or her staff? Follow-up: When did you first become aware of this importance? Please describe this experience or experiences.</li> <li>• Please tell me about an experience or individual who influenced your thinking about how principals build trust with their staff. Follow-up: How did that person/experience make you feel? Follow-up: Were you involved in a particular course of study or mentoring relationship?</li> </ul>
3. What experiences do elementary school principals report as having supported or diminished trust with their staff?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Please tell me about your school. What do you notice about the trust that exists between colleagues and administrators?</li> <li>• Do you have any examples of something you did or observed that is a good illustration of what a principal should do when it comes to building trust?</li> <li>• Do you have any examples of something you did or observed that is a good illustration of what a principal should not do when it comes to building trust?</li> <li>• What are signs that indicate to you that your educators trust you?</li> <li>• How have you adapted your professional practice over time due to your experiences and knowledge of trust-building with your staff?</li> <li>• What advice would you give a new or aspiring principal to build trust with staff?</li> </ul>

## **Pilot Procedures**

Pilot procedures focused on the interview instrument's language clarity, question sequencing, and administration time. I conducted five interviews using the pilot protocol with four practicing elementary school principals and one former elementary school principal. These individuals were considered *pilot participants* because each had a previous connection with me and so the data they supplied would not be considered in the study findings.

Based on information obtained via the pilot procedures, I made several changes to the interview protocol, such as adjusting the question wording to improve clarity and participant understanding. I specifically targeted and reviewed questions for which participants asked for repetition or clarification. Further, I added or removed questions and probes to better align the interview protocol with the study's guiding questions. For example, I added a question specifically asking about a turning-point moment in the formation of the participant's view on trust. Probes were added, especially in response to frequent answers. For example, when multiple pilot participants advised that principals "should do" something, I added the probe, "How do you know principals should do that? Was this affected by a past experience?" In addition, I added background questions to obtain participant information regarding their principalship journeys and philosophies. This background information aided in interpreting the experiences that the participants related. Finally, the sequence of questions also was adjusted to allow a better flow to the interview.

## **Data Collection and Management Procedures**

Data were collected through interviews. The seven individual interviews occurred at each participant's school site. These were scheduled via email and conducted at a time that was convenient for both the participant and me. Five of the seven interviews were conducted

outside of school hours. Prior to the start of the interview, I shared a brief statement about the purpose of the study, asked the participant to review and sign the letter of consent (Appendix D), and provided opportunities to ask questions.

To ensure accurate analysis of the information obtained, I audio recorded and later transcribed all interviews. I took field notes during the interview, writing brief notes that aided probing and follow-up questions. To ensure confidentiality, all transcripts were redacted for names and information that could reveal the participants' identities. Digital transcript files also were password protected; field notes and letters of consent were stored in a locked container to ensure confidentiality.

After I transcribed each interview, I entered it into the computer-assisted qualitative data-analysis software program, Atlas.ti. This assisted me in collecting, managing, and analyzing the data by providing a place to store transcripts, digitally code, and then extrapolate codes during the analysis process.

### **Data Analysis**

Consistent with the narrative approach, this study aimed to gather and analyze a collection of elementary school principals' stories. Narrative research examines individuals' experiences and how people internalize and make sense of those experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Riessman, 2005). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggested that narrative stories can be analyzed for three components: first, for personal and social interactions; second, for continuity of past, present, and future experiences; and third, for the physical situation or place.

Within a week of completing each interview, I reviewed and transcribed the audio recording. Upon completing the transcription, I uploaded all transcribed files to Atlas.ti as a

platform for coding the data. According to Saldaña (2016), a *code* is a word or phrase assigned to data in summary identifying an essential feature that gives the code meaning. The coding process aids the researcher in analyzing the data for patterns, categories, and themes.

To begin the analysis process, I reviewed the transcripts to identify data that was potentially relevant to each research question. All data that answered a research question were extrapolated and organized under each question. I then used this sorted data as a reference when answering all the study's research questions.

*A priori codes* are codes identified from the research prior to analyzing the data collected in the study. The initial coding of transcript uploaded into Atlas.ti used previously identified a priori codes. These recurring themes from the literature review included benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty, and openness (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999; Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). The interview transcripts were redacted into coded research texts that categorized different trust-affecting behaviors each participant reported. I then categorized each action with one of the a priori codes. This action provided a starting point to analyze for patterns among participants' responses.

After a priori coding, I re-coded the data using descriptive coding and process coding simultaneously. *Descriptive coding* assigns a word or phrase to an individual datum in summary of the topic. *Process coding* assigns a word or phrase to an individual datum describing the action (Saldaña, 2016). Saldaña (2016) stated that codes can be grouped for similarities to form additional categories and themes. By coding using both the descriptive and process methods, I could identify additional categories and themes, as well as compare among participants. As I analyzed the a priori, descriptive, and process codes, patterns emerged around the types of trust-building and trust-diminishing actions (Appendix C). The

participants' stories were broken into codes and then categorized and sorted into themes: external sources of influence, internal sources of influence, social-emotional skills, trust-building actions, and trust-diminishing actions (Appendix C). I used this information to answer all research questions of this study.

Separate from those codes and categories, I used dramaturgical coding to provide additional information on the participants' experiences concerning the role of memory and reflection on the identified themes. *Dramaturgical coding* examines data as "social drama" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 145). It assigns a word or phrase to data to examine stories for characters, conflicts, strategies, attitudes, emotions, and participants' unspoken thoughts (subtexts). Dramaturgical coding was the basis for the structural analysis and contributed to answering research questions 1 and 2. Specifically, I analyzed this study's participant stories for these elements to compare how participants came to understand trust through their experiences.

As these stories were coded, patterns emerged as to how participants became aware of the importance of trust in schools and of staff trust of the principal. I analyzed these data for similarities and differences to answer all research questions. Chapter 4 lists a synthesis of this data, and the final chapter discusses the conclusions and future implications for the findings of this research study.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations were included in the study to inform and protect the participants. The Lesley University Internal Review Board reviewed and approved the study (Appendix E). The initial recruitment email (Appendix B) contained the researcher's contact information, study purpose, and participation criteria, as well as descriptions of the compensation, voluntary nature of participation, time required to participate, and

confidentiality and privacy practices. I informed participants that they could withdraw their consent to participate at any time without any consequences or judgement and that they could keep the compensation even if they withdrew. These safeguards also were discussed at the beginning of the first interview session and expressed in the letter of consent (Appendix D). The participants were encouraged to ask questions, and all signed a letter of consent outlining their rights while engaging in the research process.

During the analysis process, I made every effort to check for accuracy in my interpretation of the data. This was especially prevalent when referring to quotations and paraphrasing responses. I ensured that I accurately characterized the meanings of the participants' responses when describing the study results. I also was aware of and limited my biases when interpreting the data. To protect the participants' confidentiality, all names and possible identifying information were redacted or changed, and all data were stored to ensure confidentiality, such as using password protection for electronic data and locked cabinet storage for hard-copy data.

### **Trustworthiness**

Measures were taken to enhance validity and reliability within this study. Shenton (2004) provided strategies to ensure trustworthiness within qualitative research studies. He referenced Guba's (1981) framework, which included four categories of trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

#### **Credibility**

Ensuring trustworthiness through *credibility* involves certifying that the study measures what it was intended to measure and represents the described situations accurately (Shenton, 2004). I took steps to ensure credibility. For example, I sought data from a variety

of participants, which allowed comparison of responses. The participants reported common views and experiences that verified similar experiences within the principal's role. Also contributing to the study's credibility, the results obtained aligned with the existing literature, especially Hoy and Tschannen-Moran's (1999) five faces of trust.

I took preventative actions, such as making the participants aware of the voluntary nature of the study and that they could withdraw at any time, to ensure participants provided genuine responses. I also discussed with participants the confidential nature of the study and asked them to share freely without consequence or fear that others would learn about what they reported. To limit my bias, I frequently consulted with my senior advisor to discuss data collection and analysis of codes, themes, and findings. Two additional dissertation committee members reviewed the research project and provided feedback.

To ensure accuracy of participants' statements, I frequently asked participants to clarify or restate their responses during the interview. Participants were forthright when I was not accurate and provided corrections during the interview. Further, I asked probing questions to gain a comprehensive picture of the participants' experiences. These probes allowed me to extract a detailed description of the situation, including how the participants experienced their stories inward, outward, backward, and forward.

### **Transferability**

Transferability describes the generalizability of the results of the study to a larger population (Shenton, 2004). I acknowledged and referenced this study as limited in the generalizability of its results. Due to its small sample size, the findings of this study should be interpreted with caution and cannot be transferred to a larger population. Instead, this study was intended to be a starting point for additional research.

**Dependability**

Dependability is the extent to which, if the study were replicated under the same circumstances, it would produce the same results (Shenton, 2004). To safeguard for dependability, I provide an in-depth description of the steps used for this study's research methodology, including data collection and analysis. The descriptions should allow another researcher to replicate the study with accuracy.

**Confirmability**

Confirmability is the degree to which the data represent the participants' responses, limiting my bias to the greatest extent possible. I acknowledged my bias and was cognizant of it during data collection and analysis. In addition, a peer reviewed the interview protocol to ensure the questions were clear and did not reflect researcher bias. The use of audio recording and transcriptions also increased reliability within this study by enhancing accuracy in the recording, review, and analysis of participants' responses. I also developed a code book with descriptions of codes and engaged in an intercoder agreement with a peer, using portions of redacted transcripts to ensure the accuracy in data interpretation (Creswell, 2013).

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter provided information on the methodology, participants, data collection, and analysis of this narrative study. It discussed how and why the narrative technique was selected. Information dealing with participants, such as their recruitment, demographics, and involvement in the study, as well as the development, pilot procedures, and implementation of the data collection tool was presented. A description of the data collection and analysis also was provided. The findings are discussed in the following chapter.



## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

### Introduction

The purpose of the study was to develop deeper insights into the experiences of elementary school principals that influence their understanding of trust in schools, with a focus on their understanding of the role they play in building trust with their staff. This chapter presents the research data and findings to address each of the three interrelated guiding research questions:

1. What experiences have shaped elementary school principals' views on the importance of trust within schools?
2. What do elementary school principals report as turning-point experiences that influenced their understanding of beliefs and actions with regard to building trust with their staff?
3. What experiences do elementary school principals report as having supported or diminished trust with their staff?

These three questions formed a framework to organize the reporting of narrative data and emerging themes. The data were collected and analyzed using narrative analysis procedures, specifically in the context of two types of narrative analysis methods: *thematic analysis* and *structural analysis* (Riessman, 2005). Thus, descriptive, process, and dramaturgical coding were used to identify themes within the data. These narrative analysis methods were chosen because they well suit answering the study's guiding research questions.

Using narrative methodology, this study focused on examining participants' experiences and personal stories. Information on the participants' backgrounds is the

foundation for interpreting their stories. Given this, it is important to provide some background information on the seven participants. The following section presents background information on the study's sample as of the time of the interviews. The participants are listed in order of the interviews.

### **Participants**

#### **Rachel**

Rachel had a variety of experiences in early childhood public education, including teaching and leadership. After becoming “really noisy” about decisions made within the school but outside of her classroom, she pursued an administrative license through the Commonwealth Leadership Academy. She currently has 9 years of experience as a principal in urban Kindergarten through Grade 2 schools.

#### **Mark**

Mark brought 19 years of experience within public and private educational settings spanning elementary and secondary grades. He began his educational career as a teacher in an urban charter school and soon realized the prescribed “style of instruction was not for me.” He then went to teach at a neighboring public school. After a few years, a superintendent in another district recruited him to move to a middle school where he held a teaching role with more leadership responsibility. From that position, Mark completed a Master's in Educational Leadership and was appointed as math curriculum director and eventually assistant principal and principal, where he currently resides. Mark described himself as a “lifelong learner.” He credited reading books on leadership as his most prominent source of knowledge about education and leadership.

**John**

John's pathway to educational leadership began as an elementary school teacher. At the request of a colleague, John took a position as a dean of students in a middle school. There he obtained the position of special education team chair, which allowed him to pursue and achieve his principal/assistant licensure. Following that role, he has been an assistant principal and eventually a principal for the past 6 years. He obtained his administrative license through the internship pathway, eventually pursuing a Master's in Educational Leadership after becoming a school administrator.

**Lindsey**

Lindsey found her way to principalship through a combination of school experiences. After working as a classroom teacher for several years, she was given the opportunity to interview for a new school principal position. That experience proved insightful and eye-opening for Lindsey. As she sat through the interviews, she realized that "these people [the interviewees] don't know the answers to these questions." Most importantly, they were not conveying the "kid factor" to the group. The experience catalyzed her to consider pursuing an administrative school licensure. Soon after, Lindsey received a mailing for an administrative licensure program, and "that's where that started." Lindsey took time off to raise her children and, during that time, completed the licensure program.

**Sean**

When Sean entered the workforce, he did not intend to pursue a career in education; he wanted work in television and film production. After obtaining a degree in psychology, Sean worked in the human service field within mental health facilities and child protective services. These experiences provided the opportunity for him to pursue a position as director

of student services at a public school. He reported, “I really didn’t want to be a principal and kind of explored different options.” After that role, he held several school-leader positions, such as assistant principal and board-certified behavioral analyst, until he was appointed to his current position of principal of an early elementary school 5 years ago.

### **Stephanie**

Negative experiences with school leaders greatly influenced Stephanie’s pathway to her current position as principal. Her push to pursue an administrative licensure was due to interactions with school leaders that made her conclude, “I really think I could do better than this.” Prior to becoming a principal, she held positions as a bilingual teacher and director of bilingual education.

### **Brenda**

Brenda had a variety of experiences that shaped her pathway to principalship. When Brenda began her career in education, it was not her intention to become a principal. However, a series of events and influential people guided her to the position. With a strong interest in social-emotional development, Brenda held early career positions in human service and counseling. When she had difficulty finding a job, she took a position as a literacy coach. In that position, she realized her passion for school leadership and the principal’s influential role in improving teaching and learning.

Soon after this realization, a superintendent from a neighboring town called her about pursuing a career in school administration within his district. She applied, although she did not believe she would be appointed. To her surprise, she was selected and served as a principal at that school for 6 years. When she became dissatisfied with the position, Brenda

took a year off to re-evaluate her career. While a participant of this study, she was in the first year of a new assignment as an elementary school principal.

Through narrative analysis, specifically thematic analysis, the next section analyzes the data from the participants' interviews to answer the research questions and identify common themes. Following that is the structural analysis of the data. This study rendered five key findings that provided insight into the experiences of elementary school principals and their perceptions on the importance of trust in their practice as educational leaders within their schools. The chapter ends with a presentation of the findings from this study.

### **Thematic Analysis**

Within this study, participants' personal accounts were analyzed using thematic analysis. A priori, descriptive, process, and dramaturgical coding identified the emergence of seven themes across the participants' stories. The study's research questions provide the framework in which these themes are organized and presented.

#### **Research Question 1: What experiences have shaped elementary school principals' views on the importance of trust within schools?**

All participants' stories were affected by their past experiences. Likewise, each experience had shaped participants' beliefs about trust. Within the stories participants shared, and in the context of their individual accounts, there were commonalities and differences along the themes of (a) essentiality of trust in goal achievement and (b) trust is difficult to define.

**Essentiality of trust in goal achievement.** Although all participants described very different experiences with trust within schools, all acknowledged its importance in school functioning. A common theme across participants' responses was the interdependence of

school staff in accomplishing the goal of student learning. Many participants referenced trust as the foundation for the interworking of individuals within a school. This interdependence occurs because one party cannot accomplish a task alone and thus must rely on others.

According to participants in this study, their ultimate goal as principals was to enhance student learning. These principals acknowledged that they cannot accomplish this goal alone and require assistance of all school members. To work interdependently to enhance student learning, participants' responses suggest the need for a clear vision and a high level of staff trust of the principal. All participants mentioned that students are their priority; their statements suggested a connection between staff trust of the principal and a positive impact on student learning through collaborative work.

The importance of staff trust in working toward school goals is evident in Stephanie's response. When asked why trust is important in schools, she stated:

As a leader, you don't accomplish anything by yourself. You only accomplish the work through other people. So, if those people aren't really on board, you aren't going to get the ship out of the harbor (laughter). You know, so trust is the basis, I think, the foundation for all of the work that you do.

Using Stephanie's ship metaphor, the principal identifies where the ship needs to go. If her staff does not trust her, they will not cooperate, and the school will not move toward its goals. This response highlights the belief that principals cannot accomplish school goals by themselves; rather, they need a foundation of trust to invite their staff to work toward their vision.

Sean also reinforced the need for trust to accomplish goals: "I think that if you can't build trust and if you can't build a community that has a shared vision, then you're not going

anywhere.” Like Stephanie’s response, Sean’s indicated that forward movement toward goals requires staff trust of the principal.

Many times, participants associated the accomplishment of school goals with positive change within the school. Three of the seven participants directly stated the need for the presence of staff trust of the principal before implementing change. John illustrated this in his response:

You really can’t implement effective, impactful change without getting your staff to trust you first. So, I think the two go hand in hand. If you want to get something done, you need to have buy-in from your staff. And the only way to get buy-in is if they trust you first.

According to John, if principals want to make positive change within their schools, they first must work to develop trust with their staff.

**Trust is difficult to define.** Participants reported that the meaning of trust is elusive. When describing the lack of clarity in the construct of trust, Mark commented, “It is something that is very hard to put a stamp or a mark on.” Brenda also commented on the abstract nature of trust when responding to how principals build trust:

It’s a funny thing. It’s sort of like saying, “How do you build air?” Right? You can’t actually set about doing it in the same way you would say, “I need to have an RtI process. I need to build that.”

Participants reported ambiguity when asked to define trust. They described trust as a perception or feeling that develops through interacting with others over time. Participants acknowledged their difficulty in defining this concept because trust is not tangible.

Research Question 1 required participants to reflect upon experiences that shaped their understanding of trust. Research Question 2 examines the themes that emerged when participants were asked to identify turning-point experiences that affected their practice.

**Research Question 2: What do elementary school principals report as turning-point experiences that influenced their understanding of beliefs and actions with regard to building trust with their staff?**

The second guiding research question for this study was intended to reveal what participants perceived as turning-point experiences that affected their understanding and practices for the importance of building trust with staff. The themes of (a) effects of broken trust and (b) actions to repair trust that emerged from participant responses relate to Research Question 2.

**Effects of broken trust.** When asked what influenced participants' understanding of trust within schools and how they came to understand how principals develop trust with their staff, all participants recalled one or more instances of impact. Six of seven participants reported one or more influential experiences with understanding trust by recalling experiences or moments when they observed or interacted with another school leader who breached trust with the participants other staff members. Five of the six reported that situations affecting their view on trust involved trust being broken by their own leadership practice or by observing the leadership practices of others. Important moments occurred for principals in this study by experiencing broken trust and observing its impact on relationships with others.

Participants reported more impactful negative experiences than positive ones. For example, Stephanie acknowledged she had some positive trust experiences with school



leaders but “more bad examples than good ones.” These negative interactions allowed her to learn what *not* to do through an internal thought process of, “Note to self: Do not do that.”

Participants also reported a greater degree of impact when the experience was negative. Their statements demonstrating the impact of situations where trust was breached with a school leader suggest its significant impact and influence on their leadership practice. When asked to describe what trust means within a school setting, Rachel responded, “You know when you don’t have it, when it’s been broken. . . . But I think it manifests itself quicker when it’s broken, and it takes longer.” She re-addressed this with a statement describing how she changes her practice based on her experiences: “I think you take bad experiences and make them into good for people so they don’t have to experience things that you have.” When describing an experience with a principal, she commented, “He was one that definitely, I was like, ‘I will never be like that.’” These statements demonstrate the impact negative leadership experiences had on Rachel’s beliefs and on her current leadership actions.

Participants learned from observing and experiencing others who acted in ways that diminished trust. When describing an influence on how principals develop trust, Sean commented:

It’s more been the people who don’t do it that I’ve learned from, who I see the issue glaring or the disconnect between them, their staff, and the larger community. That’s where I’ve probably taken most of my information from.

This statement suggests Sean’s beliefs about trust and his professional growth were the product of these negative experiences.

Although participant perceptions varied on the types of actions that diminished trust, all reported that experiences of broken or diminished trust produced a negative emotion, including sadness, anger, or disgust. These experiences include breaking confidentiality, not getting to know staff, not allowing staff to know the principal, not being collaborative, and not valuing their staff.

***Experiences with principals.*** The most commonly reported influence on participants' understanding of trust involved observing or interacting with a principal. Six participants reported experiences that involved a principal, and five of the six involved negative observations or interactions. Many participants commented that they learned what *not* to do from these experiences.

Of the negative experiences involving other principals, participants reported learning from several influential actions. Two accounts involve observing and interacting with principals who, according to the participants, were overly concerned with the positions' managerial components and did not put enough effort into building relationships with their staff. Rachel and Mark both described interacting with principals who lacked the ability to see the big picture of school functioning due to their hyper-focus on managerial details. Both participants reported the detrimental effect these actions had on these principals' ability to build trust with their staffs.

Such influencing individuals lacked the effort to allow staff to get to know them. Mark commented, "She [the principal] never took the time for them [staff] to get to know her." According to Mark, that principal's lack of interpersonal connection with staff affected her ability to lead. Similarly, recalling her experience as a new assistant principal, Rachel described the principal: "He was not a relationship person. . . because it was all about minutia

and details and it was awful.” Both Rachel and Mark indicated that they first became aware of the importance of taking the time to develop relationships with staff when interacting with these individuals. Their experiences contributed to their realizations that they did not want to lead that way.

One participant reported a positive influential moment in coming to understand how principals build trust with their staff. Lindsey described an experience with a principal who “brought the school staff together” to produce an inclusive working environment. According to Lindsey, through experiences like that, the staff felt the principal valued and trusted them to make decisions on professional growth. The principal also listened to staff’s requests and supplied them with resources to accomplish goals. Lindsey reported that, in her current principalship, she strived to create an environment to bring the staff together.

*Experiences with superintendents.* Three of seven participants reported influential experiences in their understanding of trust that involved a superintendent. These three participants described five experiences with superintendents that affected their views on the importance of staff’s trust of school leaders. Two of those experiences involved a situation where trust was diminished; the other three were positive interactions that resulted in increased trust.

Two participants described negative events involving superintendents. First stating her belief regarding the importance of getting to know staff on trust-building—“You can’t build trust with people if you don’t know them for who they are as people”—Rachel then described a superintendent who did not take time to get to know her personally. Her statements conveyed her belief that learning about other people relates to whether they will trust her.

Stephanie also described a superintendent with whom she felt caught between his authority and her own beliefs:

I had a superintendent . . . that was quite directive in the way that he wanted me to administer the school and I really wasn't comfortable with it. But I wasn't able to articulate that in a way that would have been more productive. And so, I feel like sometimes I was caught between what he was telling me to do and what I was comfortable with and the staff.

This experience influenced Stephanie in that being able to voice her opinion became important to her as she developed as a leader. It allowed her to appreciate another superintendent for whom she worked afterwards. With that subsequent superintendent, Stephanie was able to be more honest about her beliefs and have authentic discourse regarding what she felt was the best way to lead her school.

Along with Stephanie's example of positive interactions with a superintendent, John provided two positive experiences with superintendents in which he felt supported. He described an experience in which he missed a deadline, but his superintendent did not reprimand him. Instead, she "had his back" and provided guidance on how to be more successful in the future. John proffered a similar account in which a different superintendent supported him during a time when his staff was unhappy with his leadership practices. This influencing individual also guided and mentored John during that period. Such actions allowed participants to understand how trust is developed through supportive leadership actions.

**Actions to repair trust.** The second theme that emerged for Research Question 2 emphasized the importance of acting to repair trust. Three of seven participants reported

experiences when trust was repaired through the actions of apologizing or taking ownership of a mistake. These experiences helped participants understand the importance of such actions toward restoring trust with staff.

John demonstrated how he learned about the importance of apologizing and taking ownership of mistakes with an experience involving a school principal early in his teaching career. When describing an experience that affected his views on staff trust of the principal, he began, “I have a story of a time when I was let down by a leader and then was able to regain trust in her, which has actually influenced me a lot.” In his account, the school principal made a mistake and, in John’s opinion, did not handle the situation correctly. The mistake led to an upset parent calling John at his home.

The principal acknowledged making the mistake and apologized to John. John reported that this powerful action repaired the trust that was broken in the initial incident:

But from that point on, I developed so much respect for her, and we became really close, and I think part of it was because she screwed up and she owned it. And I trusted her from there on. She took ownership over the fact that she had . . . messed up. That, you know, if you make a mistake, you’ve got to own it. And I’d like to think I do that. So, I think I was probably influenced by that. That influenced me a lot.

He later described an experience in which he committed an action that decreased trust with his staff. He attributed learning the importance of admitting his mistakes and taking action to repair it as a motivating factor in how he reacted to that situation.

Similarly, Stephanie commented on the need for leaders to admit mistakes in order to repair broken trust. She stated that principals need to “be willing to apologize” to repair trust.

Stephanie described a situation in which she made a “half-joking” comment that offended a staff member. Stephanie admitted the mistake “immediately” and took the restorative action of asking the staff member for a private meeting. During that interaction, Stephanie “apologized profusely” and wrote the staff member a note the next day. The staff member then approached her, grateful for her actions in acknowledging the mistake. Stephanie believed her actions “rebuilt” the trust that had been broken due to her mistake. When commenting on trust and this situation, she stated,

That’s how fragile it is. You know, it can be gone like that (snapped finger).

So, it was an example of what to be careful not to do, but it was an example of if you do something like that, just own it right away.

Stephanie described trust as delicate and easily broken; therefore, she believed a leader needs to admit mistakes when they occur.

Research Question 2 required participants to openly reflect on their experiences related to understanding the importance of building trust with staff. Research Question 3 explored participants’ perceptions on how their present experiences and practices as principals support or diminish trust with their staff.

**Research Question 3: What experiences do elementary school principals report as having supported or diminished trust with their staff?**

The last guiding research question for this study was intended to reveal participants’ perceptions on how their current experiences and practices support or diminish trust with their staff. Research Question 3 presented the themes of (a) trust is built through intentionality of principals’ behaviors, (b) trust is built through honest and open actions, and (c) trust is diminished by a lack of perceived competence.

**Trust is built through intentionality of principals' behaviors.** The first theme that emerged for Research Question 3 was that trust was built by principals acting intentionally in their daily interactions and through small, incidental ways with school staff. Moreover, all participants maintained that a principal's actions over time can strengthen or decrease trust, and trust develops through multiple interactions between the trustor and trustee.

According to all participants, principals play an active role in building trust with their staff. When asked what the principals' role is in such trust-building, all seven participants commented that it is a part of their job. They described it as the principals' "responsibility" (Stephanie), a "priority" (Rachel), and "to foster it" (Mark). Stephanie's response illustrates:

Oh my gosh. That's like your responsibility. I mean, that's huge. It's not going to happen, if you're not doing it. . . . You can't rely on other people to do that. That's 100% your responsibility. And you do it, and then everybody else will do it too.

Stephanie's comment highlights that the responsibility of trust-building cannot be delegated to others; rather, it is up to the principal to develop trust with his or her staff.

A common sentiment among participants is the idea that principals should actively engage in small, intentional behaviors to build trust with their staff. No participant reported grand gestures. Rather, they described everyday actions they incorporate into their school leadership practices. Actions that participants reported engaging in to build trust with that staff included being visible around the school, listening actively, supplying guidance when needed, communicating frequently, and keeping sensitive information confidential. Many participants referenced the importance of shared decision-making and transparency in their leadership practice. Six of seven participants described the importance of principal actions in

creating a school environment that fosters risk-taking with regard to trying new things professionally, sharing weaknesses without judgement, and increasing collaboration to share expertise.

This intentionality of principal actions was especially evident when participants described situations in which staff trust of the principal was broken or diminished. During those times, participants were cognizant of the impact of their behaviors and intentionally engaged in actions to restore staff trust. In one example, John reported that he realized staff were beginning to not trust him during a time when he was frequently absent. Once aware of this, he took action steps to be more visible through additional classroom visits and by providing opportunities for staff to meet with him individually and in groups to discuss their concerns.

**Trust is built through honest and open actions.** An additional theme that emerged for Research Question 3 was that trust is built through open and honest principal actions. For this analysis, Hoy and Tschannen-Moran's (1999) framework was used to categorize the trust-building and -diminishing actions. Although participants reported trust-building actions that were categorized within all the five faces of trust, most trust-building actions fell into the categories Hoy and Tschannen-Moran labeled as honesty and openness. Participants' responses referenced the importance of being able to collaborate and communicate effectively and empathically, as well as to listen to others. These actions require the leader to be self-aware of their actions and of how those actions affect others.

Consistent with the literature, in this analysis thematic categories of the coded data on participant trust-building actions aligned with the five faces of trust: benevolence, honesty, openness, reliability, and competence (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999). In this section, the



“five faces” serve as organizational headings for the action categories, ordered from the category with the most frequently reported actions to the category with the least frequently reported actions.

***Openness.*** According to Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999), *openness* involves sharing information with others. Through this study’s data analysis, participants’ most frequently reported ideas, beliefs, and experiences aligned with Hoy and Tschannen-Moran’s openness category. Participant actions categorized in this section involved sharing expertise, collaborating, being transparent, setting expectations, and listening to staff.

Frequent communication was a common theme within participants’ responses assigned to this category. Participants referenced exchange of information as a principal’s responsibility when developing trust. When asked what the principal’s role is in developing trust, Lindsey commented, “It’s in having really open lines of communication.” She described how she practices this as a principal, crediting an “open door policy” so staff can enter her office at any time to present ideas, ask questions, or discuss concerns.

References to transparency or examples of instances indicative of transparency also were frequent, especially those regarding decision-making and sharing of school and district information. When asked to provide an example of what builds trust, Mark commented, “Transparency.” He described examples of openness with communication, including sharing leadership feedback from the superintendent and communicating his personal and school goals with his staff:

Transparency. Sharing out what feedback I get from the superintendent to anybody else. Showing everyone what is to help them construct our school improvement plan, to make school decisions. Sharing with them [staff] what

my goals are for the school. What my goals are for myself as the leader of the school. Just putting things out there. I believe in no secrets. No secrets to children, no secrets to families, no secrets to staff. . . . And through transparency, I think you can get down to what it is that isn't happening and get to a point of what it is that can happen.

All participants also reported the importance of encouraging staff to share knowledge and opinions. Their responses suggested the importance of all voices being heard and accomplishing the work of a school through collective staff effort. Mark described his leadership as involving collaboration with decision-making. He stated, "You are not the only one who makes the decision. . . . I really want to know other people's decisions, other people's thoughts. I like to be reflective." Sean echoed this sentiment, discussing a collaborative-leadership style involving teamwork and the importance of staff feeling valued: "I mentioned before cohesiveness within teams. Teams are able to take on a lot more when they feel they have a voice and they're trusted, and their opinions are valued."

Within the openness category, demonstrating appreciation for staff was another common subtheme among participants. Rachel described why she shows appreciation for her staff in her statement: "I think it's that people will go above and beyond because they feel like they're trusted and appreciated. Trust to me is about appreciation, also." Lindsey also commented on the importance of praise in acknowledging her staff's accomplishments: "I think it's important to highlight what's working . . . so that you acknowledge the hard work that people do each day."

**Honesty.** According to Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2015), *honesty* involves making truthful statements, matching words with actions, and owning mistakes. Six of seven

participants reported a trust-building action that referenced honesty. Two of the most frequently mentioned actions related to honesty are providing truthful feedback and having difficult conversations. Participants described the importance of being honest with giving feedback, whether it is positive or negative.

Stephanie's responses frequently referenced having truthful conversations. She commented:

It's just being more direct and upfront, I think. Whether it's bad or good. It's a tricky thing, you know, it's not always telling people what they want to hear and it's not always giving people what they want. But it is hearing them and then being honest with whatever the answer is going to be.

According to Stephanie, having difficult conversations involves listening to what the other person has to say but still being direct and honest with feedback. She described an important part of having difficult conversations with staff is keeping in mind that they are human and treating them with dignity and respect:

I think it's, like if you have bad news to deliver then you go to the person and you're just upfront and you just say, "You know, here's the deal. Here's what it is." And make sure you answer all their questions and give them support.

She described experiences of situations in which she was not renewing employees' contracts—her need to be "upfront" and "honest" about the issues but also "still caring about them as a human being."

Mark addressed the need for difficult conversations in building trust, as well. In addition to highlighting its importance, he commented on the reciprocal nature of being

honest with all school community members: “I tell them the truth. . . . I am not going to blow smoke. . . . I expect you [school community members] to do the same.”

Participants also referenced the importance of modeling one’s values and matching their words with actions. These statements included the importance of keeping promises and being a role model. This was illustrated by Lindsey’s comment when asked what the principal’s role is in building trust: “I think you need to be a role model. I think you need to be an active listener. So, when you’re in situations, you’re actively participating and modeling you.”

John echoed the importance of matching words with actions when building trust. Asked what trust meant to him, John responded, “Trust means that you are going to do what you said you were going to do, in that your word is followed by actions.” He stated that trust is built through supporting staff members and claim his words of support match his actions. For example, he sat in on contentious parent meetings and read difficult parent emails, as well as assisted teachers to draft return emails in those situations.

Participants also reported admitting mistakes and taking action to repair trust. Two of three experiences that involved this trust-building practice referred to actions participants committed as a principal. Stephanie described an experience in which she accidentally insulted a staff member. She apologized and wrote the individual a note to reinforce her regret. “And that person came back and was just so grateful that I had recognized that . . . that everybody makes mistakes and that I truly was, you know, I did not intend it to be that way.” This experience solidified Stephanie’s belief that admitting mistakes and apologizing strengthens trust.

John's responses reported the same sentiment. When describing an example of something that built trust, John provided an experience in which he had been absent frequently during a month-long period. During that time, he also had asked his staff to make some major changes to the building schedule. Due to his absence and demands, his staff threatened a "vote of no confidence." Realizing the break in leader trust, John admitted his lack of visibility, met with staff members to hear their concerns, and acted to address the issues. In these cases, the participants were not only appreciative that the principal was forthright, but also perceived that their actions strengthened how others viewed their integrity.

***Benevolence.*** Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999) described *benevolence* in a trusting relationship as acting in the other person's best interest. Six of seven participants referred to trust-building actions that involved benevolence. Participants commented on having the best interest of others in mind when engaging in leadership. Stephanie highlighted this importance in her statement:

So, it really has to be a whole entire environment, where each human being in that environment has to trust that the other people are, have their best interest at heart. . . . It's really that you have their best interest at heart. That is really the key.

Sean echoed this idea in reporting that he acted in his staff's best interest by being "aware of their needs, their well-being, and their interests" when making leadership decisions.

Creating an environment where staff members are comfortable to take risks was also reported as a way to build trust. The ability to create an environment where individuals take

risks without fear of punishment benefits them with increased personal and professional growth. Rachel described her desire to foster this type of environment:

I don't want teachers to feel like they can't ever take a risk, you know, because that's stifling for everyone. . . . The word around here, "Don't worry, [Rachel] will help you, you know. You can trust. . . . If she is going to be judgmental, it's going to be because she is going to help you to learn."

Rachel continued discussing the importance of staff feeling comfortable to take risks in order to grow. When describing what she noticed about the trust that exists between staff and the principal in her school, she focused on the staff's ability to take risks to foster professional growth:

I think, here, it is about taking risks. And everybody constantly learning. Like I said before, I've been in observations where teachers have said, "I'm going to try something new," and I think of one particular example which I know was actually a huge moment in like, me really showing my staff that, like, they could trust me to try new things and take risks.

Rachel described an experience in which she stopped a teacher-evaluation observation to support a teacher who was trying something new. Rachel praised the teacher's attempt, even though it did not turn out as planned, and did not count the observation against the teacher.

**Competence.** Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2015) described *competence* as the belief that the person being trusted has the requisite skill set to fulfill the expectation of a specific role. The ability to provide direct, hands-on support or feedback to staff when they require guidance was something participants reported as building trust. Brenda demonstrated this

belief by describing an influential moment when she learned the importance of trust in schools. She described leadership:

Being a leader is knowing when people need you to step in and say, “Here’s what we are doing and here is how I want you to do it.” And when the better move for the longer run is to say, “Here’s where we are going. Join me in deciding what the next steps are.”

Brenda’s comment demonstrated the need for leaders to know when to provide directive guidance and when to work with staff members collaboratively. This ability requires knowledge of leadership, as well as of the art of teaching.

Participants also reported knowledge of leadership skills and pedagogy as important in establishing staff trust of the principal. For instance, Brenda stated:

I feel like I was out there enough to really get to know where they’re at. I feel like the skill set I bring around curriculum and kids and the counseling piece and child development is just what they need. So that feels really nice. Like when they say, “I need help.” I can help them and that also really builds trust. Right? When someone says, “Help me.” And you can give them quickly something very practical that is useful; they’ll come back to you again.

Brenda’s comment illustrated that trust is built by demonstrating competence. According to Brenda, once staff members trust that the principal has the skill level to help them, they will continue to ask for guidance.

The ability to make decisions efficiently also was referenced as a quality that builds staff trust of the principal. Mark referred to the principal’s responsibility to make tough decisions:

It's just the nature of the beast. You need to get over it. You can't, it's not that you have to be heartless, but you have to put things in perspective. And you have to be able to make the tough decisions when the job requires you to do so. And you have to own them. You can't put blame on somebody else. You have to, you're sitting in the big seat. You are making the big bucks. You have to put your big-boy pants on and make the decisions that may not be the most popular. But are the right decisions to make. So, folks that don't do that—I would say is the kiss of death.

This comment described Mark's belief that effective leaders need to make tough decisions and accept the consequences of these actions.

***Reliability.*** Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999) described the category of *reliability* as predictability in actions. Three of seven participants referenced reliability in the trust-building actions of principals. Mark's responses frequently described the need to be consistent with leadership practices. He commented that trust is "earned" by being consistent with leadership practices and equity in staff treatment. When asked to supply advice to a new principal on building trust, Mark provided many statements, among them, "Be consistent."

John also described his actions to maintain consistency in his leadership and his expectations for staff. He stated that he provides staff with the improvement plan and role expectations at the beginning of the year: "So the staff knows the expectations are clear because they are in a document that is given to them when we start." He also frequently referred to his staff being aware of his "non-negotiables" as a way to provide consistent leadership practices.



**Trust is diminished by a lack of perceived competence.** The third theme that emerged for Research Question 3 was that trust decreased when staff perceived that the principal lacked competence. Similar to the organization of trust-building behaviors, actions that participants reported as decreasing trust were categorized within Hoy and Tschannen-Moran's (1999) five faces of trust framework. In contrast to the reported trust-building actions, most trust-diminishing actions participants reported were associated with the category of competence.

**Competence.** When participants identified leadership actions that diminished trust, their descriptions were consistent with Hoy and Tschannen-Moran's (1999) *competence* face of trust. These actions included principals who paid too much attention to details, had difficulty making tough decisions or made impulsive decisions, and gave advice outside their areas of expertise. Participants also reported the actions of not being visible to staff and introducing too many initiatives as trust-diminishing practices the principals had engaged in or observed.

Rachel and Mark recalled times when they were observing and interacting with educational leaders who were hyper-focused on the schools' small details. Mark described an individual who influenced his understanding of the importance of trust in schools: "I think that she was too driven professionally and could not see the forest through the trees." He elaborated that because she was so focused on the professional, day-to-day tasks of the principal's job, she spent less time forming relationships with staff. That ultimately negatively affected her ability to develop trust with them. Rachel described a similar individual who influenced her views on how principals build trust:

My first year as an assistant principal working with a principal that was all-consumed with details and all-consumed with processes and procedures and nothing about instructional leadership and nothing about relationship building. It was always about the details and the minutia. And the, you know, there was a joke with the staff that I was pulled into about the cones he had to have out a certain way at dismissal. That was all he was about. And I was like, “I can’t.” . . . People were in my office all the time, like, you know, they just needed to vent because there was no, they didn’t trust him at all. Because of all the, he was not a relationship person; he was not a man of his word because it was all about minutia and details, and it was awful.

Participants reported leaders who postponed or avoided making tough decisions or who made impulsive decisions as not trustworthy. Being able to make tough decisions was reported to be a principal’s responsibility. Mark described not being able to make decisions as “the kiss of death.” Making impulsive decisions without considering or gathering others’ input also was noted as an action that could decrease trust. Sean provided an example in which he made a “knee-jerk reaction” to a request for more staffing to support a student. After considering the situation and gathering more information, he realized his reaction was not appropriate and took steps to rectify his behavior. He said he felt that this situation negatively affected his trusting relationship with the staff member.

Mark stated that he does not trust people if they give advice outside their areas of expertise. For instance, he said he does not trust people to give him leadership advice if they had not been a principal. “They can’t tell me what it is like to be an elementary principal if

they have never been an elementary principal. I respect you, but I don't trust what you just said."

***Openness.*** Leadership actions that diminished trust, as participants reported, related to the category of *openness*. Reported actions involved leaders making isolated decisions without collaborating with others. Staff trust diminished when leaders did not engage others in the decision-making. Sean, Mark, John, Lindsey, and Brenda reported noncollaborative decision-making or top-down directive leadership as actions that decrease trust.

Sean described the top-down directive leadership style as creating "pockets of resistance." His comment illustrated an example:

I came from working environments where it was always kind of patriarchal and kind of forced compliance. You did because you were told to do. And it was a top-down approach to leadership. And one of the things I noticed in that process was that there wasn't a collective purpose or journey toward a goal. It was an isolated journey. . . . It was really hard for everyone to trust the leadership because of this.

That style led to decreased trust of the leadership due to its lack of transparency and collaboration.

***Honesty.*** Leadership actions that participants reported as diminishing trust also aligned with Hoy and Tschannen-Moran's (1999) *honesty* category. These actions included not being honest when giving feedback. For example, when describing an experience in which he provided nonevaluative feedback and praise to a staff member throughout the school year, John referenced dishonesty and decreased trust. That is, he stated that he had not been truthful regarding her teaching flaws. However, during the teacher's summative

educator evaluation at the end of the year, he provided truthful negative feedback on areas she needed to improve. The staff member became angry because she had not received honest feedback throughout the year. She told John that if he had given her honest feedback from the start, she could have made the adjustments he desired *before* her summative review. He described this situation:

My first year as principal, I made some major mistakes. . . . When it came time for the supervision and evaluation process, I made some judgements based on teacher performance that were not anticipated by the teachers necessarily. I hadn't done a great job leading up to that because I was too busy trying to be people's friend and trying to show folks that I was there to support; but I wasn't supporting in the right way. I wasn't supporting and helping them become better educators. So, when I marked some folks as "needs improvement," I needed to sort of circle back and regain their trust, and there was one teacher in particular that was pretty angry.

John reported that his action of dishonest feedback at the beginning of the year was detrimental to his relationship with the teacher and decreased her trust of him.

***Benevolence.*** Participants reported two trust-diminishing leadership actions that aligned with the *benevolence*. Two participants described situations in which they observed leaders who did not take the time to get to know their staff members personally. Rachel described a former superintendent:

If someone said to him, "Tell me about [Rachel]," he wouldn't know one thing. Not one thing about me as a person. And so why am I going to go, you

know, and trust him with information or advice or whatever if he doesn't even know who I am as a person.

Rachel's comment highlights the importance of staff feeling as though the principal knows them beyond their professional interactions. Similarly, Mark described a principal he worked for who did not take time to develop relationships with staff: "She could talk about it and had all these great ideas but what she was missing was building that trust." He discussed her inability to build trust as directly associated with her lack of interpersonal relationships with staff because "she never took the time for them to get to know her."

***Reliability.*** One participant reported a leadership action that diminished trust related to the category of *reliability*. Rachel described an experience in which she did not praise her staff equally. It happened when two grade levels at her school engaged in the same activity, and she praised only one of them. She received staff member feedback stating that the other grade was upset because they had not gotten the recognition they deserved, given that they performed the same action. Rachel noted that her action decreased trust with the unacknowledged staff member. She learned from the experience that she needed to be consistent and equitable with her praise.

Thematic analysis was used to identify and present the above seven emerging themes. The second analysis approach, structural analysis, was used to identify patterns in how participants narrated their professional experiences related to trust. The next section provides a structural analysis of the participants' responses.

### **Structural Analysis**

Analyzing the participants' experiences within this study allowed me to identify commonalities within the types of stories participants told as having influenced their views

on trust. This structural analysis provided information to support Research Questions 1 and 2. This analysis used dramaturgical coding to examine the stories participants told. After each story was dramaturgically coded, they were placed in chronological order.

Participants' reported influential experiences that sparked two types of cognitive reactions within participants. One type of story participants reported involved pivotal experiences or "Aha! moments" where the experience fit within the individual's existing schema. This caused the individual to confirm an existing view in the moment. For this analysis, stories of this type are categorized as *pivotal experiences*. The second type of story involved a participant's experience observing or interacting with other leaders that led to ruminating on the experience over time. Participants reported a change to their subsequent leadership practices based on their reflection on these experiences. In these situations, they identified not only what they did *not* want to do, but also the leadership practices in which they *did* want to engage. These stories are categorized as *ruminating on experience*. The next sections provide additional descriptions of these two types of stories participants reported—*pivotal experiences* and *ruminating on experiences*.

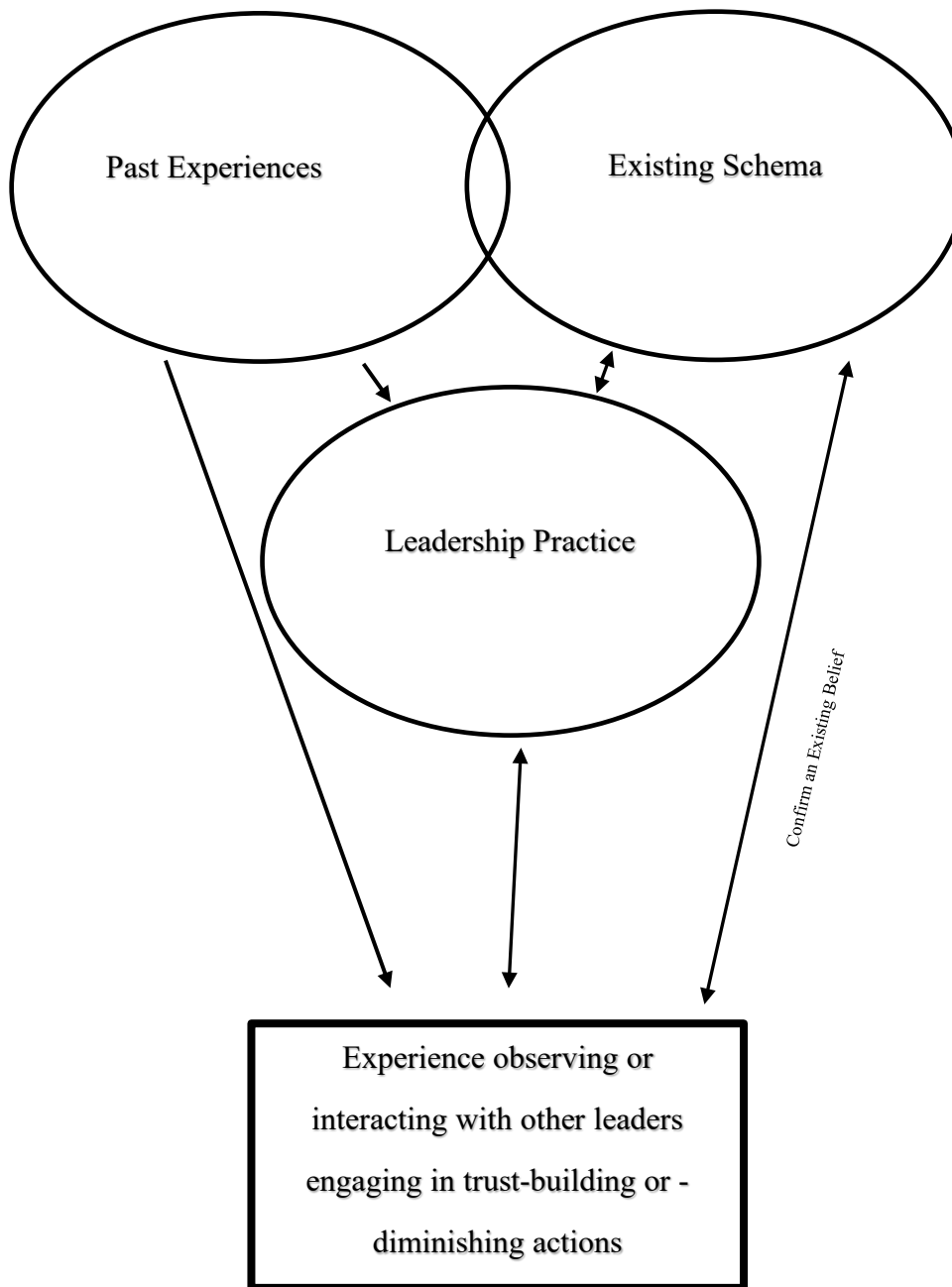
### **Pivotal Experiences**

All participants articulated experiences that they considered "turning-point experiences" or "Aha! moments" in their development of an understanding of trust within schools. Most experiences that participants reported involved observing leaders engaging in actions that increased or decreased trust with their staff. In some stories, the participant's observation of others engaging in leadership actions caused an immediate confirmation of an existing schema. During those experiences, in the moment, participants narrated their stories by affirming the action or by noting what not to do. Most experiences they described

incorporated negative interactions in which participants identified leadership actions in which they did not want to engage. Statements such as, “Note to self: Do not do that,” “I will never be like that,” and “I don’t want to lead like that” followed these actions.

Figure 6 demonstrates the impact that experiencing and observing others engage in trust-building or -diminishing actions had on the participants’ cognitive schemas and leadership practices. The three circles in the top left of the figure represent the individual’s experiences, existing schema, and leadership practices. As designated by arrows, these three elements affect how the individual experiences the current situation. The “experience observing or interacting with other leaders engaging in trust-building or diminishing actions” box represents the in-the-moment situations participants reported as turning-point experiences. These pivotal experiences caused an immediate confirmation of an existing schema. This reaction is represented in Figure 6 by a two-way arrow from the “experience observing or interacting with other leaders engaging in trust-building or diminishing actions” box to the “existing schema” circle.

Stephanie described a pivotal experience with a superintendent who was unkind and with whom she did not “see eye-to-eye.” She related a story in which the superintendent talked negatively about his staff. His actions made Stephanie “uncomfortable.” After this experience, she stated, “Note to self: Do not do that.” In that moment, Stephanie’s experience with the superintendent caused an immediate reaction for her and confirmed her belief that she should not speak negatively about others.



*Figure 6.* Impact of pivotal experiences on cognitive schema and leadership practice.

Lindsey also shared an example of a pivotal experience that fit within her existing belief system. She described a principal she worked for who “really brought us [school community] together,” and described a specific time when that principal allowed teachers to



work together in a professional growth activity. Lindsey stated, “When we as a team would go to him . . . about a need we have or this is something we really want to work on or we could do better with, he trusted us and our decision-making.” In one experience, the principal provided resources and time for the teachers to work. He also offered to watch the teachers’ students while the teachers completed their work if they promised to share the information obtained with him. This experience confirmed Lindsey’s belief that principals should foster group work and collaboration to build trust with staff.

These pivotal experiences confirmed existing beliefs and caused the individual, in the moment, to identify a leadership practice in which they did or did not want to engage. The second type of story provided deeper learning for the participant and involved the experience of an impactful moment that caused subsequent reflection. This rumination led to shaping the participants’ current leadership practices.

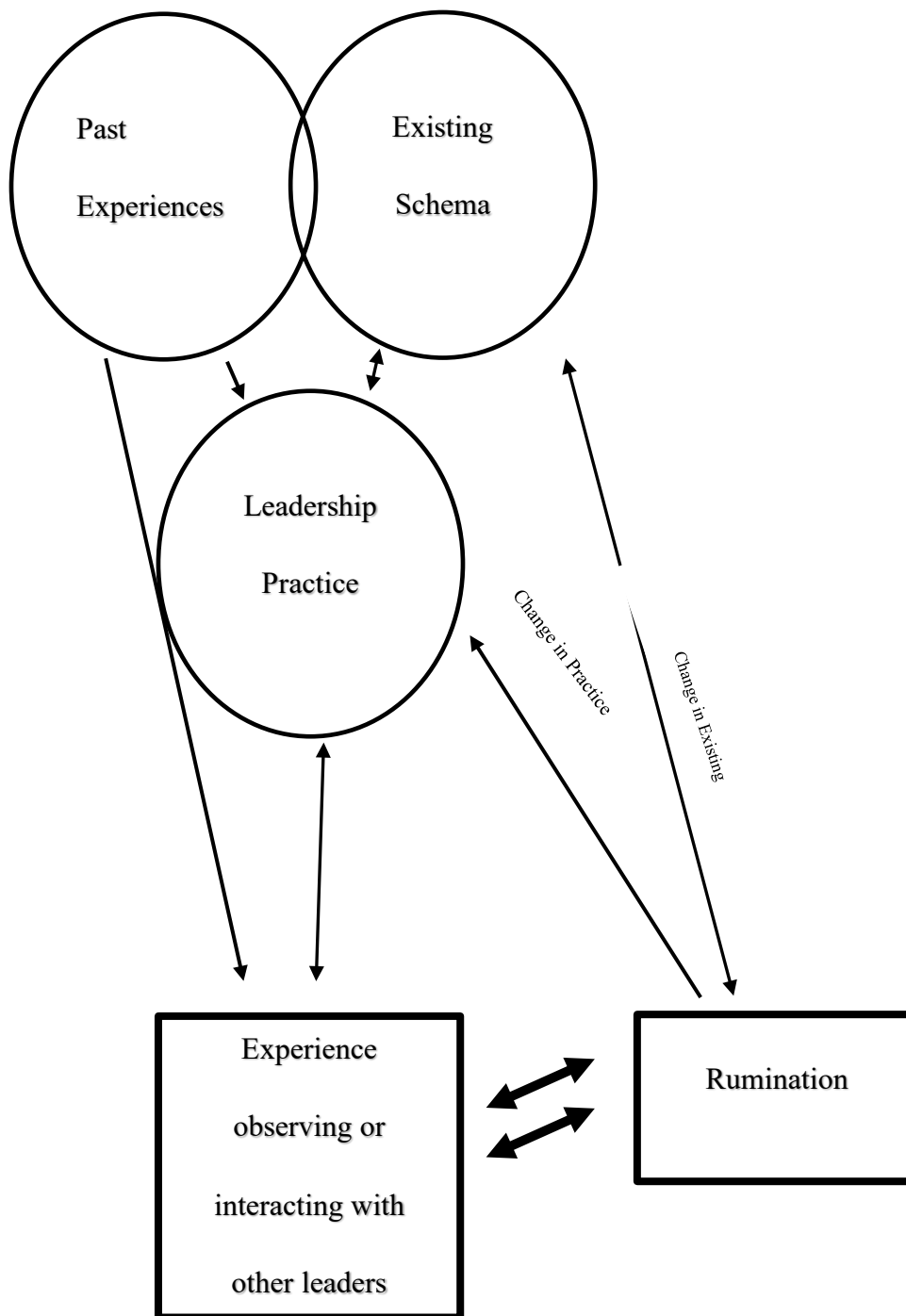
### **Ruminating on Experience**

Some experiences participants reported had influenced their trust-building beliefs through their rumination and reflection over time. These experiences caused the participant to think about the situation after it ended because it involved a failure of trust, caused emotional hurt, or did not fit into a pre-existing cognitive schema. Many times, these experiences caused the participant to engage in thinking about things they had not considered before. Although not all participants used the word “reflection” within the study, they all referenced the concept of reflection or reflective practice in different ways.

Participants reported experiences that sparked reflection. In the moment, these situations caused the participant to identify not just actions in which they did not want to engage, but also, thinking about it over time, a better leadership practice they did want to do.

All past experiences impact how individuals interpret their current situations. The experiences that caused rumination also helped shape the participants' leadership practices after they thought about it over time.

Figure 7 demonstrates the impact that experiencing and observing others engaging in trust-building or trust -diminishing actions had when the experience challenged the individual's existing schema and they engaged in rumination. Stories where participants ruminated on their experiences involved the individual observing or interacting with other leaders that led to subsequent reflection on the experience over time (designated by the two-way arrows from the "experience observing or interacting with other leaders engaging in trust-building or diminishing actions" box to the "rumination" box). Participants reported a change to their subsequent leadership practices based on their reflection on these experiences. In these situations, participants identified not only what they did *not* want to do, but also the leadership practices in which they *did* want to engage (designated by the arrow from the "rumination" box to the "leadership practice" circle). These types of situations also produced a change in the individual's schema (designated by the two-way arrow from the "rumination" box to the "existing schema" circle).



*Figure 7.* Impact of ruminating on experiences on cognitive schema and leadership practice.

The following examples illustrate how ruminating on experiences led to leadership actions, as reported by participants. Sean recalled a set of experiences in which he worked for

an individual who engaged in a “top–down” and “forced compliance” leadership style. Sean described the lack of “collective purpose or journey toward a goal.” When describing this experience, he stated, “You did because you were told to do so.” He recognized the negative impact on morale and work production with his colleagues and described feeling “isolated” and that those experiences provoked reflection. The rumination occurred when he questioned, “Why would there be such a disconnect between the leadership and the people who were doing the work?” He commented, “Things like that kind of resonated with me over time and helped me forge the things that I think are important.” Now, his leadership style and practice reflect his belief in collaboration and collective effort. Sean reported that he recognized the importance of “all voices being heard” through his negative experience. He provided examples of how he collaborated with his staff to strengthen trust, such as brainstorming with a variety of professionals on how best to support a student with behavioral issues.

The acknowledgement of negative experiences and their impact on the participants translated into how these participants interacted with others. Rachel’s personal account illustrated an example of how an influential moment affected her leadership practice. She clearly connected her experience with a superintendent who did not get to know her personally to her current philosophy on leading a school and her leadership practice. When describing her philosophy on leadership, Rachel emphasized relationships: “Relationships first. You can’t do the hard work unless you have formed relationships. . . . That’s the trust piece. You have to do the relationships building first and that builds the trust, getting to know people as people.” This belief directly related to her experience with the school leader who did not get to know her and thus negatively affected her trust in that leader. Rachel’s belief

about the importance of getting to know staff also influenced Rachel's current leadership practice. When asked about ways she builds trust with her staff, Rachel stated she conducts entrance interviews with all new staff, during which she gets to know them beyond their professional identity.

John also reported an experience in his early career that affected his current leadership actions. As a teacher, John had an influencing experience where he felt he was "wronged" by a principal. That individual rectified the situation by hearing John's concerns, admitting her mistake, and apologizing. This experience paralleled another John reported in his career as a principal, in which trust was broken with his staff. In that experience, John was frequently absent during a month-long period, and his staff threatened a "vote of no confidence." John met with them individually and in groups to hear their concerns and then addressed the issues by acknowledging his absence and taking suggestions on how to improve things. He commented, "[I] talked to them about what I could do immediately . . . to fix some of their concerns." He again recognized the benefit of listening to concerns and acknowledging mistakes when trust is broken: "It ended up, in the long run, ultimately making us grow a little bit closer as a staff."

Participants reported the immediate and ongoing impact these experiences had on their views of trust through ruminating and reflecting on the experiences. When describing influential moments, participants chose the stories they told based on the significant impact the experiences had on their views of trust within schools. They reported reflecting on these turning-point experiences to influence their current leadership actions.

Through dramaturgical coding in the data analysis phase, commonalities emerged from the participants' stories. Participants reported two types of stories: *Pivotal experiences*

led the individual to identify what to do or not to do in the moment. This experience fit within an existing schema and caused the individual to confirm this view. *Ruminating on experiences* involved engaging in an impactful experience and then thinking about it over time. This rumination not only confirmed or denied an existing belief, but also shaped the individual's practice. Through internalizing their experiences, participants reported engaging in actions that reflected what they had learned. Data and emergent themes, as well as the analysis approaches used to interpret the data, were presented in the preceding sections. The following section presents the findings from this study.

### **Explanation of Findings**

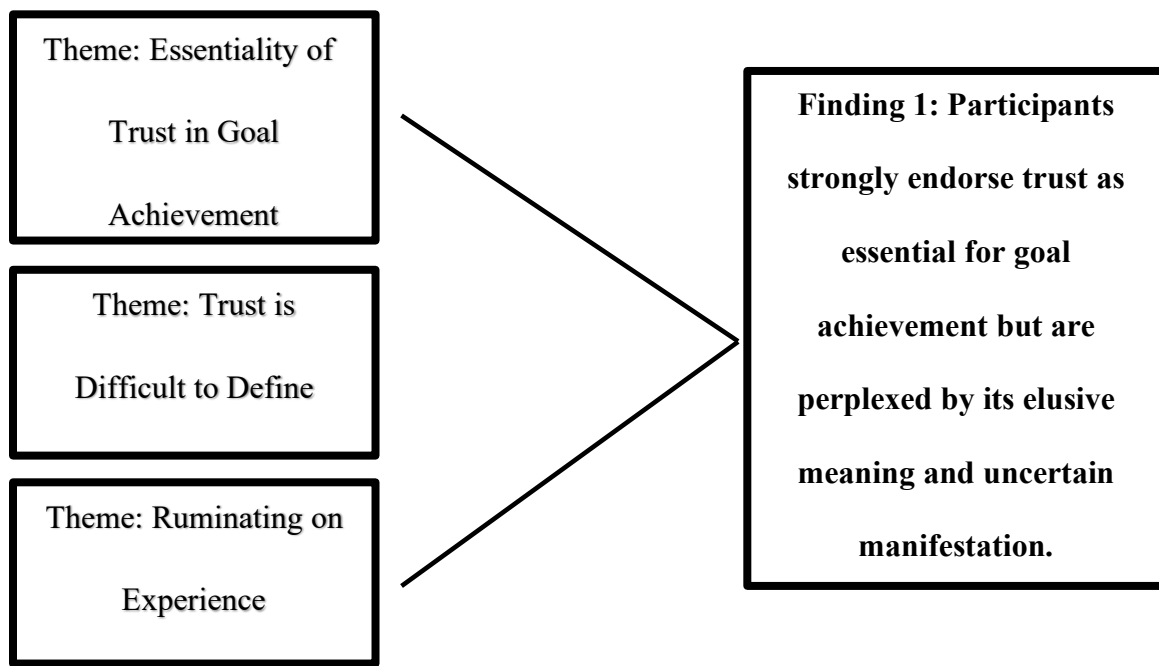
The data collected and analyzed rendered five findings that provided insight into the experiences of elementary school principals and their perceptions on the importance of trust in their practice as educational leaders within their schools. All findings include the theme of *ruminating on the experience*. Such reflection resulted in the participants making sense of their experiences and contributed to the formation of their beliefs on trust. The following section presents each key findings of this research study with its related themes.

#### **Finding 1: Participants strongly endorse trust as essential for goal achievement but are perplexed by its elusive meaning and uncertain manifestation**

Trust is the foundation for the interdependent work of school staff to accomplish school goals. These goals cannot be accomplished in isolation; they need collaborative measures to be achieved (Theme: *essentiality of trust in goal achievement*). At the same time, trust is an elusive concept that does not have a widely accepted definition or a consistently predictable procedure for building trust upon which principals can rely. Due to this lack of clarity, trust can be difficult to understand, which in turn affects the leader's ability to

coordinate the staff's interworkings to achieve school goals (Theme: *Trust is difficult to define*). These realizations result from the individuals reflecting on experiences and making sense of their own understanding of trust as it manifests in schools (Theme: *Ruminating on experience*).

School leaders know that trust is essential and critical to accomplish school goals, but its lack of a clear definition makes it difficult for them to exercise control over the levels of trust within their schools (Figure 8). Juxtaposed, these two themes form a dichotomy that school leaders struggle to overcome.

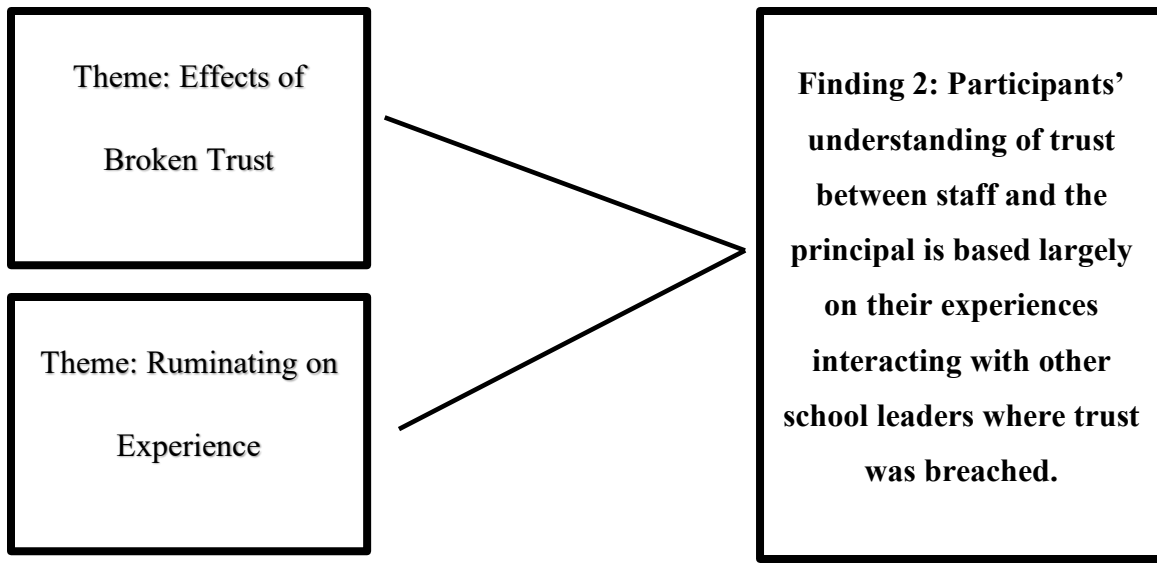


*Figure 8.* Themes and Finding 1. This figure represents the three themes (*Essentiality of trust in goal achievement*, *Trust is difficult to define*, and *Ruminating on experience*) that, when examined together, produced Finding 1: Participants strongly endorse trust as essential for goal achievement but are perplexed by its elusive meaning and uncertain manifestation.

**Finding 2: Participants' understanding of trust between staff and the principal is based largely on their experiences interacting with other school leaders where trust was breached**

Participants most often cited situations in which they experienced a breach of trust as having shaped their understanding of trust. With regard to trust in schools, this experience typically involved a school leader, specifically a principal or superintendent. Broken trust was easier to identify and caused a more significant emotional impact than actions that built trust (Theme: *Effects of broken trust*). Through ruminating on these experiences, school leaders' beliefs are shaped, and leaders identify actions in which they do not want to engage within their own leadership practice (Theme: *Ruminating on experience*). Figure 9 depicts how these two themes formed Finding 2.



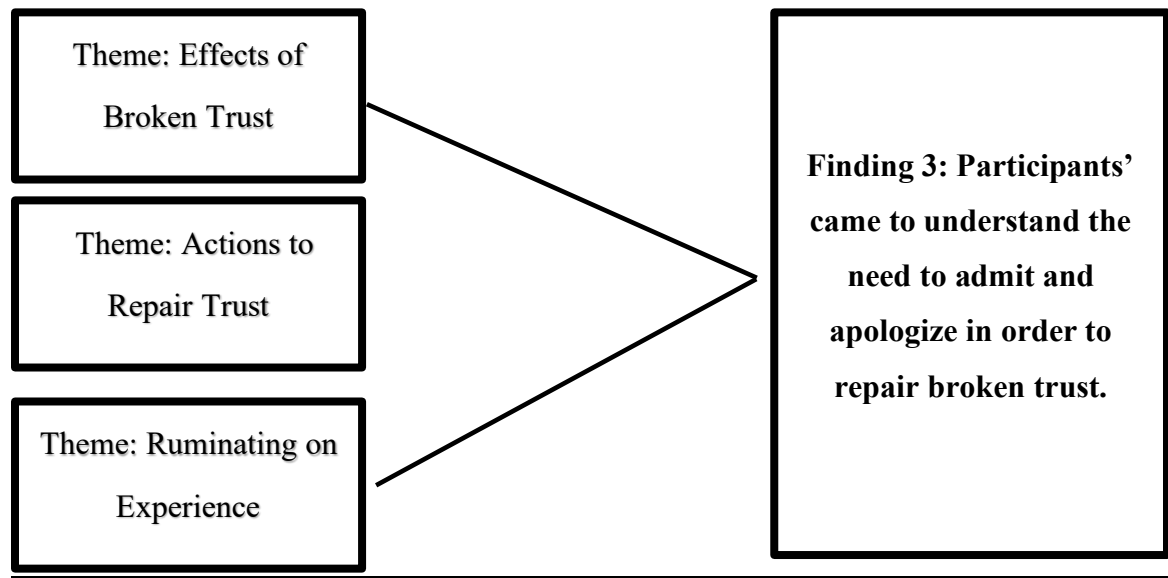


*Figure 9.* Themes and Finding 2. This figure represents the two themes (*Effects of broken trust* and *Ruminating on experience*) that, when examined together, produced Finding 2: Participants' understanding of trust between staff and the principal is based largely on their experiences interacting with other school leaders where trust was breached.

**Finding 3: Participants' came to understand the need to admit and apologize in order to repair broken trust.**

Situations where school leaders engaged in actions that repaired trust had a major impact on participants' understanding of trust-impacting actions. School leaders experienced situations where trust is diminished (Theme: *Effects of broken trust*) and repairing actions taken by the person who broke the trust (Theme: *Actions to repair trust*). The actions of apologizing and admitting mistakes were commonly reported practices for repairing trust when it was breached. Through reflection on these experiences, participants identified the

impact of these trust-repairing actions as positively influencing participants' relationships with school leaders (Theme: *Ruminating on experience*). (See Figure 10.)

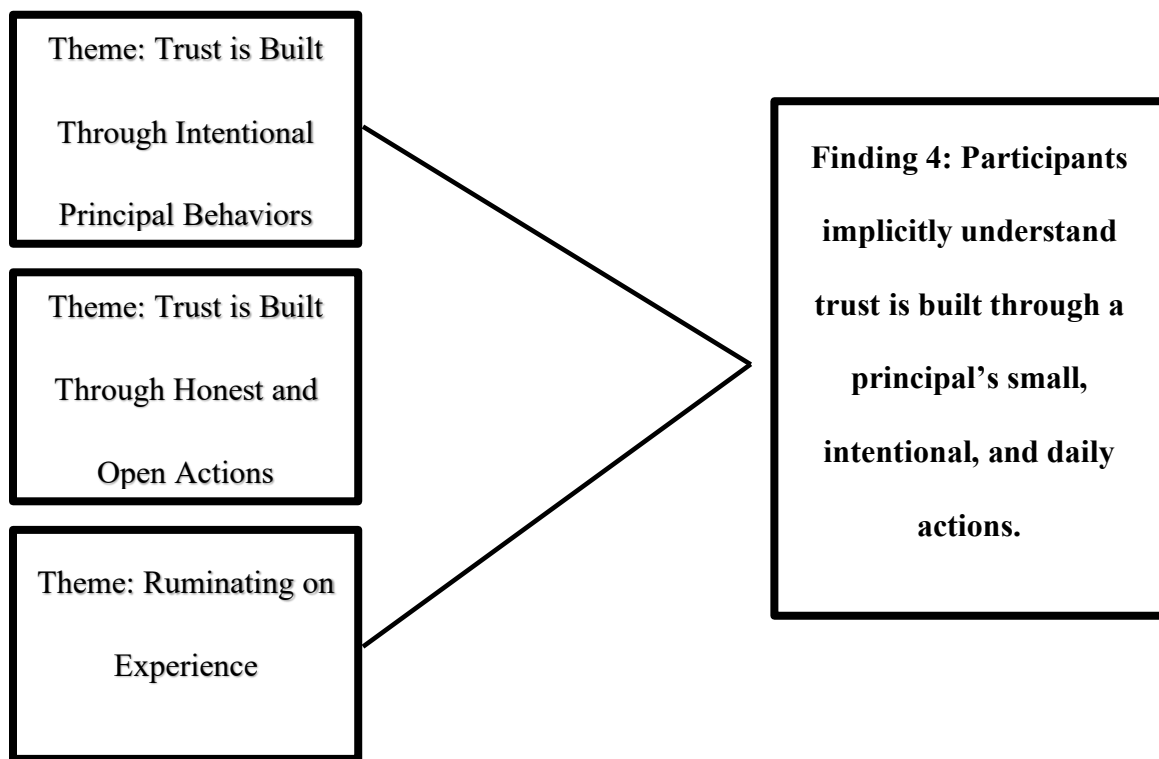


*Figure 10.* Themes and Finding 3. This figure represents the three themes (*Effects of broken trust*, *Actions to repair trust*, and *Ruminating on experience*) that, when examined together, produced Finding 3: Participants' came to understand the need to admit and apologize in order to repair broken trust.

**Finding 4: Participants implicitly understand trust is built through a principal's small, intentional, and daily actions.**

Participants demonstrated a tacit understanding that trust is built through small, everyday actions. Although grand gestures could affect trust, the actions participants commonly reported as influential were everyday occurrences, such as being visible around

the school, listening actively, supplying guidance when needed, communicating frequently, and keeping sensitive information confidential (Theme: *Trust is built through intentional principal behaviors*; Theme: *Trust is built through honest and open actions*). Participants engaged in and experienced these small actions. By reflecting on these experiences, the principals identified behaviors that built trust (Theme: *Ruminating on experience*). They become aware that they must be cognizant of their habits and daily interactions with staff because they are important in building trust (Figure 11.)

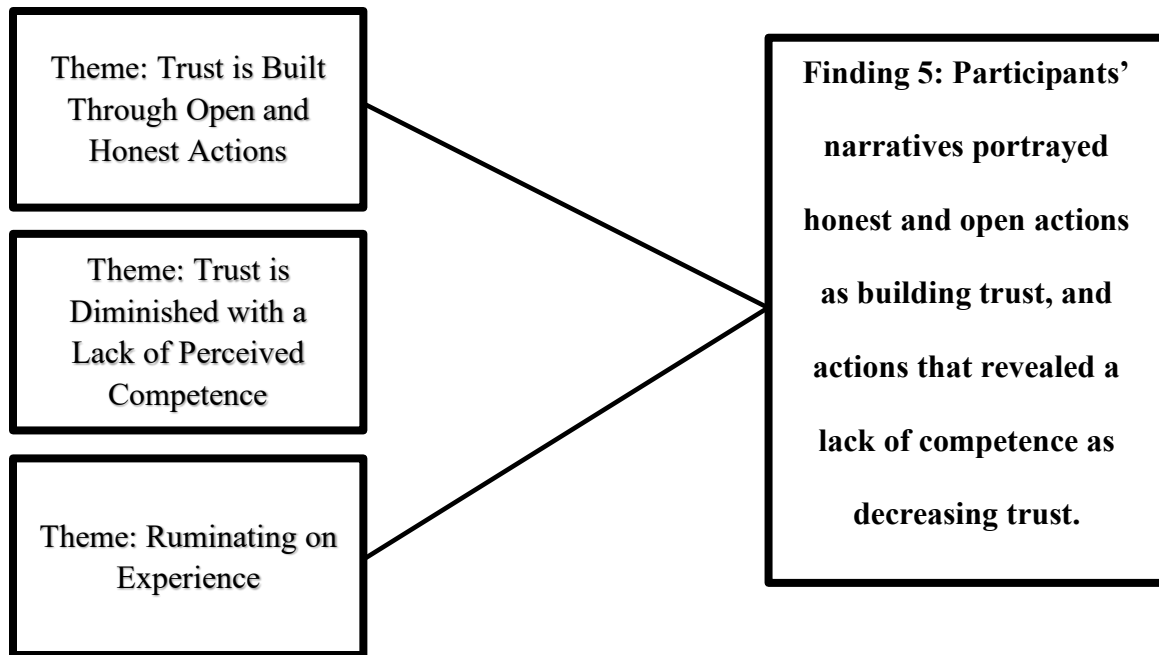


*Figure 11.* Themes and Finding 4. This figure represents the three themes (*Trust is built through intentional principal behaviors*, *Trust is built through honest and open actions*, and *Ruminating on experience*) that, when examined together, produced Finding 4: Participants implicitly understand trust is built through a principal's small, intentional, and daily actions.

**Finding 5: Participants' narratives portrayed honest and open actions as building trust, and actions that revealed a lack of competence as decreasing trust.**

Participants' narratives involved an increased likelihood of building trust when the individual's actions were perceived as honest and open. They reported that school leaders participate in honest actions when they have truthful conversations about staff performance, engage in behaviors that align with their communication of values and expectations, and admit their mistakes. Principals actions that are considered open include providing frequent and transparent communication, as well as considering and encouraging staff to share their thoughts and ideas (Theme: *Trust is built through honest and open actions*). In contrast, participants' stories included diminished trust when staff perceive a leader as lacking competence. It was reported principals who hyper-focus on small details rather than the school as a whole, struggle to make tough decisions, or give advice outside of their areas of expertise are perceived as lacking competence (Theme: *Trust is diminished with a lack of perceived competence*). Participants identified these trust-building and trust-diminishing actions through reflection on their experiences. After the experiences, the participants were able to identify behaviors they believed built and diminished trust as a result of contemplating their own and other leaders' actions (Theme: *Ruminating on experience*).

(See Figure 12.)



*Figure 12.* Themes and Finding 5. This figure represents the three themes (*Trust is built through honest and open actions*, *Trust is diminished with a lack of perceived competence*, and *Ruminating on experience*) that, when examined together, produced Finding 5:

Participants' narratives portrayed honest and open actions as building trust, and actions that revealed a lack of competence as decreasing trust.

### Chapter Summary

This chapter provided an analysis of the interview data collected for this study. The narrative method was used to analyze participants' experiences relative to their understanding of trust within schools. Thematic and structural analyses were used to identify themes and common patterns among participant responses. The following findings were discovered and described:

Finding 1. Participants strongly endorse trust as essential for goal achievement but are perplexed by its elusive meaning and uncertain manifestation.

Finding 2. Participants' understanding of trust between staff and the principal is based largely on their experiences interacting with other school leaders where trust was breached.

Finding 3. Participants' came to understand the need to admit and apologize in order to repair broken trust.

Finding 4. Participants implicitly understand trust is built through a principal's small, intentional, and daily actions.

Finding 5. Participants' narratives portrayed honest and open actions as building trust, and actions that revealed a lack of competence as decreasing trust.

All the findings exemplify the participants' experiences and reflections on their journey to understand trust and its impact on their practices as educational leaders. The findings generated from this study offer implications for the practice of elementary school principals, educational leadership preparation programs, and scholarship.

This chapter presented this study's themes, supporting data, and five key findings. In Chapter 5, these key findings and their implications are further examined and suggestions for future research are considered.

## **CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, FUTURE RESEARCH, AND FINAL REFLECTIONS**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of the study was to examine the experiences of elementary school principals that influence their beliefs about and knowledge of trust. It also examined how these experiences affect their leadership actions. Through analysis of what practicing elementary school principals reported in interviews, this research examined principals' stories and accounts of their development in how they came to understand trust within schools and what it means to them within their administrative roles. This chapter reviews the study's five major findings and provides implications for practice and recommendations for practice and future research.

### **Summary of Literature Review**

The literature review examined trust as it manifests within organizations, with a focus on staff's trust of a principal. It explored the following bodies of literature: trust within organizations, trust and noneducational settings, trust and educational settings, trust and educational leadership, the psychology of educational leadership, and school-administrator training and licensure. The following is a summary of the literature regarding the definition of trust, trust within organizations, and trust between principals and staff in schools.

### **Definition of Trust**

Within the literature, a single, universally accepted definition of trust does not exist due to the complexity of the construct, its many layers of meaning, and possible cultural impact (Hosmer, 1995; R. C. Mayer et al., 1995; Rousseau et al., 1998). Several common

elements occurred across definitions, including positive expectations, the presence of risk, and interdependence among parties (Rousseau et al., 1998).

### **Trust Within Organizations**

Trust is especially important within organizations due to the unique hierarchical dynamic (Diefenbach & Sillince, 2011). Within organizations, trust can be categorized into portrayals depending on its manifestation. Deterrence-/calculus-based, knowledge-based, identification-based, relational, and institution-based are portrayals of trust that function within organizations (Rousseau et al., 1998; Lewicki & Bunker, 1996; Shapiro et al., 1992). Trust models, which describe the interplay of components that affect trust, provide an understanding of the interconnection of organizational components on trust. The integrative model of organizational trust (R. C. Mayer et al., 1995), organizational trust model (Shockley-Zalabak et al., 2010), decision to trust model (Hurley, 2012), and organizational trust model (Zak, 2018) share common elements, including the importance of context, previous interaction between the trustor and trustee, and trustor's willingness to trust, as well as the factors of benevolence, honesty and openness, competence, and integrity.

High levels of trust have been linked to various positive outcomes, including increased job satisfaction and employee engagement (Knoll & Gill, 2011; Rich, 1997), increased productivity and sales (Davis et al., 2000; Rich, 1997), commitment to the organization (Mahajan et al., 2012), retention of employees (Costigan et al., 1998; Davis et al., 2000), and positive organizational climate (Knoll & Gill, 2011). The perception of leader trustworthiness was correlated with voluntary acceptance of authority decisions (W. C. Kim & Mauborgne, 1993; Tyler & Degoe, 1996).



In contrast, low trust levels have been associated with lower employee satisfaction (Shockley-Zalabak et al., 2010). Establishing and maintaining trust is difficult within organizations (Kramer & Cook, 2004), and broken trust in the form of betrayal damages relationships and requires restoration practices to repair and build trust again (Tschannen-Moran, 2014).

### **Trust Between Principals and Staff in Schools**

The development of trust is the principals' responsibility and direct result of their actions (Day, 2009; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1999). Tschannen-Moran and Hoy's (1999) five faces of trust framework provides a categorizing system for behaviors in which principals engage that, according to the participants, build trust. This framework includes the categories of *benevolence* (acting in the best interest of others), *reliability* (consistency with words and actions), *competence* (possessing the required skill set), *honesty* (acting in accordance with ethics and principles), and *openness* (readily sharing information).

Given the importance of school leaders' actions, factors that influence school leaders' behaviors were explored. Multiple factors influence principals' behaviors, including their professional identities, emotional intelligence, reflective practice, preparation/training programs, and administrative evaluations. A principal's professional identity is a fluid process that continuously shapes the individual's experiences and reflection on these situations (Crow & Møller, 2017).

Principals' engagement in reflection influences their behavior. How individuals experience and then reflect influences how they experience subsequent situations (Robertson, 2017). The literature identified the individuals' emotional intelligence as a factor that affects leaders' behaviors. The conceptual frameworks of emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995;

J. D. Mayer et al., 1999), multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1983), and social-emotional competencies (CASEL, 2019) provide dimensions that mold principals' behaviors, including interpersonal intelligence, intrapersonal intelligence, self-awareness, and social awareness.

The principals' administrative training and preparation programs, as well as their administrative evaluative reviews, influence their leadership behaviors (Dodson, 2015; Gentilucci et al., 2013; Perez et al., 2011). Most programs combine academia and field work. Research has supported that the field-experience portion of this training has a large impact on preparing principals for their roles (Dodson, 2015; Perez et al., 2011). Educator evaluations also play a role in the continuous professional growth of principals (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2018).

### **Summary of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to gather an understanding of elementary school principals' beliefs about trust, as well as examine their experiences that influenced how they came to understand trust. This study also examined how these experiences affect principals' current leadership actions with regard to building trust with their staffs.

The following three research questions guided this study: (a) What experiences have shaped elementary school principals' views on the importance of trust within schools? (b) What do elementary school principals report as turning-point experiences that influenced their understanding of beliefs and actions with regard to building trust with their staff? (c) What experiences do elementary school principals report as having supported or diminished trust with their staff?

## **Design of the Study**

This study was qualitative in nature and used a narrative methodology to examine the experiences of principals related to trust. Although many narrative approaches exist, this study was framed within Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) description of narrative research as grounded in how people make sense or meaning of their experiences and that an individual's past experiences shape how they interpret subsequent occurrences (Dewey 1938/1997).

This research examined how principals' experiences influenced their views on trust and trust-building. Incorporating principals' reflections, this study examined principals' stories of how they came to understand the importance of trust within schools and trust-building practices that affected their ability to engage in trust development with their staff. It also examined the social context of these experiences and how they shaped the stories participants reported.

Purposeful sampling was used to select individuals to participate in this study. Participants were seven practicing elementary school principals with at least 3 years of experience in that position. An interview protocol was developed with interview questions and possible probing questions focused on gaining information regarding how the participant experienced the situation inward, outward, backward, and forward (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50).

The interview protocol was piloted with five current and former principals for procedures, clarity of language, sequencing of questions, and length of time to administer. As the researcher, I conducted, audio recorded, and transcribed all interviews. Transcription files were managed via the Atlas.ti software program.

I began data analysis by extrapolating and organizing data under each research question. I used a priori coding to categorize the data into themes identified in the existing literature. These initial themes included benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty, and openness (Hoy & Tschannen-Moran, 1999; Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). After a priori coding, I re-coded the data using descriptive coding and process coding (Saldaña, 2016). By coding using both methods, I could then identify additional categories and themes, as well as compare among participants. These data were sorted into the themes of external sources of influence, internal sources of influence, social-emotional skills, trust-building actions, and trust-diminishing actions (Appendix C). Separate from the aforementioned codes and categories, dramaturgical coding provided additional information on the participants' experiences to identify common patterns or elements in how they told their stories.

### **Limitations**

This study has limitations that decrease the generalizability of its results. Given this study's small sample size, results should be interpreted with caution and cannot be generalized to all principals. Consistent with Handford and Leithwood's (2013) recommendation, future research should examine trust within schools on a larger scale to identify if these results can be generalized to a larger population.

Participants in this study volunteered to participate, which may have resulted in an overrepresentation of how principals view the importance of trust. That is, prior to engaging in the study, all participants were made aware that I would be collecting data on trust within schools. Participants who did not believe trust is important or could not supply detailed

information about their trust-building practices may not have volunteered to participate in this study.

### **Summary of Findings**

This study yielded five findings from analyzing the identified themes. These themes and findings provide insight into the experiences of elementary school principals and their perceptions on the importance of trust in their practice as educational leaders within their schools.

#### **Finding 1**

**Participants strongly endorse trust as essential for goal achievement but are perplexed by its elusive meaning and uncertain manifestation.** Trust is necessary to accomplish school goals due to the interdependent nature of the organization. However, because there is not a universal or agreed-upon meaning or consistently predictable procedures for building trust, it can be difficult for leaders to work to improve trust. Thus, most of their learning about trust comes from their experiences.

#### **Finding 2**

**Participants' understanding of trust between staff and the principal is based largely on their experiences interacting with other school leaders where trust was breached.** Situations where trust is broken produce more emotional impact than do actions where trust is built. Individuals are affected when trust is broken due to the emotional hurt it causes. Through reflecting on these negative experiences, leaders can shape their beliefs on trust and identify the leadership actions in which they will choose to engage.

**Finding 3**

**Participants' came to understand the need to admit and apologize in order to repair broken trust.** Experiences of both broken and repaired trust are integral to participants' explanations of how they came to understand trust. Reflecting on experiences where trust was breached, they commonly report apologizing and admitting mistakes as practices to repair trust. These actions support the restoration of relationships and aid the individuals in moving forward, working toward the achievement of individual and school goals.

**Finding 4**

**Participants implicitly understand trust is built through a principal's small, intentional, and daily actions.** Principals build trust through everyday interactions with their staff. Reflecting on their interactions with staff to identify actions that build trust, principals identify intentional behaviors, to include being visible around the school, listening actively, offering guidance, communicating frequently, and keeping sensitive information confidential.

**Finding 5**

**Participants' narratives portrayed honest and open actions as building trust, and actions that revealed a lack of competence as decreasing trust.** Participants report that they are likely to build trust if they are perceived as acting in honest and open ways, such as having truthful conversations about staff performance, engaging in behaviors that align with their communication of values and expectations, admitting their mistakes, providing frequent and transparent communication, and considering and encouraging staff to share their thoughts and ideas. In contrast, trust is diminished when staff perceive a leader as lacking

competence. Actions that lead to that perception include hyper-focusing on small details rather than the school as a whole, struggling to make tough decisions, and giving advice outside of the leader's areas of expertise.

When examined collectively, all findings support the importance of trust experiences and actions within the interpersonal relationships of principals and their staff members. The next section discusses the findings as they relate to the existing body of literature.

### **Discussion**

In this section, the study's findings are discussed and considered in relation to the existing research. Four discussion points are identified: importance of trust, ongoing learning through reflection, utility in the five faces of trust framework, and complexity of trust-impacting experiences.

#### **Importance of Trust**

Trust in the principal is essential for the accomplishment of school goals and overall functioning of the educational organization (Tschannen-Moran, 2014; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). As evident in this study's findings, especially Findings 1, 4, and 5, participants' stories reveal a belief in the importance of the existence of trust with their staff. Participant responses suggest they spend their valuable time engaging in intentional actions and reflecting on their experiences to enhance their ability to build trust. Their responses also suggest they identify actions that affect trust and use that knowledge to navigate subsequent interactions.

#### **Ongoing Learning Through Reflection**

The findings, specifically Findings 1, 2, and 3, support the contention that participants' learning about trust is ongoing and rooted in reflecting on their experiences and

the experiences of others. Dewey (1938/1997) identified two principles of learning that apply to the idea of learning through reflection. My study was developed on the principle of “continuity of experience” (p. 35). Dewey also identified the principle of “interaction” (p. 10), which refers to the internal conditions of an experience. Dewey stated that educational experiences that produce learning contain both of these principles and involve interaction between the learner and what is being learned. Within participants’ narratives, both principles were present when describing the ongoing learning that occurs through reflection on their experiences.

Within participants’ narratives, they describe their learning as based on multiple experiences and not just a one-time occurrence. The learning that occurs from each experience produces each participant’s cumulative understanding of trust (Dewey’s “continuity of experience” principle). The ability to identify an experience and subsequently reflect to produce new learning is a common sentiment among participants (Dewey’s “interaction” principle). Participants’ willingness to reflect on how certain experiences affected them, as well as others, extends their learning trajectory.

### **Utility in the “Five Faces of Trust”**

Tschannen-Moran (1999) provided information on different orientations that produce trust (five faces of trust). These “faces” are present throughout all the participants’ stories and evident in the study’s Findings 2, 3, 4, and 5. Participants identify these components as crucial throughout their training and experiences in the development of trust. The omnipresence of these orientations within the narration of the participants’ stories suggests the utility of this “five faces” framework. That is, there are many points of consistency between what the participants said as they narrated their experiences and the five faces. Thus,



the concepts and vocabulary of this framework might have utility for practitioners who engage in ongoing efforts to maintain trust in their schools.

### **Complexity of Trust-Impacting Experiences**

Many findings in this study, especially Findings 3, 4, and 5, suggest that participants do not see the complexity of trust in their stories. Instead, their narrations reveal a sense that they perceive trust as linear with oversimplified views of trust-impacting behaviors. That is, they report a causal explanation—if they engaged in a certain behavior X, then trust would increase; if they engaged in behavior Y, then trust would decrease. For example, Mark reported that trust is built when principals have an “open door policy” where staff can come in to speak to him without an appointment. His narration suggests that when he engages in this action, trust increases with his staff. In contrast, Sean reported trust is decreased when principals make impulsive decisions. When he makes impulsive decisions, trust decreases with his staff members.

What participants did not report within these stories were the other factors at play that also affect trust. The impact a certain behavior has on trust is more complex than a linear effect. The achievement or reduction of trust cannot be predicted just because a behavior has occurred. Whether trust is increased or decreased also depends on factors associated with the trustors, such as their experiences and their interpretations of the other person’s behavior, as well as the context of the situation in which the behavior occurred.

These additional trust-impacting factors are identified within R. C. Mayer et al.’s (1995), Shockley-Zalabak et al.’s (2010), Hurley’s (2012), and Zak’s (2018) models of trust. The trustor’s experiences, especially interactions with the trustee, affect the product of a trust in situations. R. C. Mayer et al. (1995) identified the trustor’s perception of the trustee’s

ability, benevolence, and integrity as factors that influence trust. The trustor's experiences also affect the trustors' characteristics, including willingness (propensity) to trust (Hurley, 2012; R. C. Mayer et al., 1995). Additional factors that are influenced through interactions between trustors and trustees include similarities between the parties, how well the trustors feel they can predict the trustees' behaviors, and how frequent and honest their communication has been during past interactions (Hurley, 2012). Hurley (2012) also identified contextual factors, such as the power difference between the trustor and trustee, as having an impact on trust.

Participants' stories also did not reference the impact of the culture within the organization. Shockley-Zalabak et al.'s (2010) and Zak's (2018) models identified factors associated with culture, including the organization's ability to achieve goals, communication systems, employee engagement, and overall organizational concern for employee well-being. During participants' narrations of their stories, their sense that a certain behavior causes trust to increase or decrease did not take into account these additional factors identified in the literature.

In sharing the trust-building and trust-diminishing behaviors, participants identified similar behaviors but perceived them as having different trust outcomes. This disparity suggests the influence of factors other than just the individual's action on trust. For example, when examining the five faces of trust's (Tschannen-Moran, 1999) *competency* orientation, participants identified the principal's behavior of providing guidance to their staff. Lindsey described this as a trust-building behavior and appreciated that a principal could provide instructional support to staff members. In contrast, Mark reported a similar action but interpreted the action as that principal overstepping and giving advice outside of his area of

expertise—which, Mark reported, ultimately decreased trust. These contrasting examples speak to the variability of how trustors interpret similar actions as trust-building or trust-diminishing depending on their perceptions and the context of the situation.

The next section discusses how this study’s findings can influence the training and practice of principals. Subsequently, recommendations are presented for future research on the role of trust and its development, as well as actions for aspiring and current school leaders to develop a deeper understanding of trust interactions to improve this important part of school functioning.

### **Implications for Practice**

This study contributes to the existing research on trust within the field of educational leadership. It offers insights into how currently practicing principals have come to understand trust and identifies their perceived trust-impacting actions. This research examines principals’ stories to identify their views on trust, which has the potential to produce crucial learning for other principals and leaders, as well as educators overall. The following identified implications should be included in the training and professional development of principals.

#### **Learning About Trust is Ongoing**

Participants in this study describe how their views on trust evolved through their experiences. Their understanding of trust is not the product of one experience or occurrence; rather, it is a cumulative understanding produced through multiple compounding experiences. It is ever changing as a result of each individual’s experiences. School leaders should be aware that their understanding of trust is not shaped by one experience or training. They

should also have the understanding that transformational moments in their life experiences shape their beliefs in this area.

### **Increasing Leaders' Skills**

Many participants' stories convey the notion that certain behaviors cause an increase in trust, whereas other behaviors cause a decrease in trust. However, the impact a behavior has on trust is not linear; it is beyond a single action. Multiple other factors, including other circumstances within the situation, the trustor's past experiences, the trustor's interpretation of the trustee's behavior, and past interactions between the trustor and trustee, are at play. An implication from this study is for leaders to increase their skill set through explicit instruction and use of guiding tools to support their ability to view the establishment of trust as multidimensional and complex.

The impact of behaviors on trust involves a component of the context of the situation. As such, leaders should be taught skills to analyze situations for these multiple elements, including thinking critically about the social context and engaging in self-reflection and social awareness. Increasing leaders' ability to think critically and consider the social context allows them to develop a deeper understanding of how outside factors affect trust. Teaching leaders how to enhance their self- and social awareness better prepares them to identify how the context and their actions affect themselves and others. Along with explicit instruction, the use of protocols and guiding tools can be developed to support this reflection and subsequent learning.

### **Recommendations for Leadership Practice**

This study provided insights with regard to leadership practice. The following are recommendations to support principals in their trust-building practices.

## Self-Reflection Tool

Self-reflection tools for analyzing the multiple components of trust should be developed to help principals think critically about interactions with their staff. These tools could support reflection, self-awareness, and social awareness by prompting reflection questions on analyzing antecedents, behavior, and outcomes of the interaction. These tools could not only assist reflection, but also enhance learning from interactions with staff.

Before engaging in an interaction with staff, these tools could prompt principals to analyze the situation for the multiple components that affect trust and to consider the following:

- Contextual factors: Consider the organization's culture, similarities between the trustor and trustee, organizations ability to accomplish goals, and so forth.
- Previous interactions with staff member: Have these interactions built trust? Have both parties' expectations been met?
- Principal's past experiences: Has the principal had similar experiences? What were the outcomes?
- Principal's self-awareness: How does the principal predict the situation will make them feel?
- Principal's social awareness: How does the principal predict the staff member will feel? How will this interaction affect them?

These reflection questions will help principals to identify the behavior in which they will engage, as well as predict how this behavior will affect themselves and the other parties.

After principals engage in the trust-impacting behavior, they can reflect on the outcome of the interaction. They can identify if the interaction was trust-building or trust-

diminishing. If the interaction resulted in a perceived decrease in trust, then principals could be prompted to consider trust-restoring actions, such as apologizing or admitting their mistake. Through a protocol, the principals also could be promoted to reflect on if they would interact differently in the future. By using a guiding protocol, principals could engage in a reflection process that enhances their ability to engage in trust-building behaviors and learn through reflection, self-awareness, and social awareness.

### **Feedback**

Along with tools to support reflection, principals also should engage in shaping their trust-building practices through ongoing feedback with peers and supervisors. Participants report learning through their own experiences with others and address the important role experiences had on their understanding of trust. In addition to being taught skills to enhance analysis of the context, leaders should be given the opportunity to receive in-the-moment feedback to strengthen their understanding of trust and trust-building abilities.

### **Observation of Others**

Participants report the powerful learning that occurred through observing other principals and school leaders. This study points to the value of developing a means for systematic observations of other leaders to gain a better understanding about trust. Similar to development of the self-reflection tools, developing protocols for principal–peer observations could allow analysis of these observations for many dimensions (e.g., ethics, decision-making, and motivations).

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This study was designed as an entry point to explore principals' views on trust and trust-building actions. To improve this important part of school functioning, additional

research that continues to explore the role of trust, its development, and the benefits for school leaders to have a deeper understanding of it is needed. That research should explore diverse samples, staff members' perspectives on building trust, and the social-emotional training of principals.

### **Diverse Sample**

Going forward, future research should concentrate on a more diverse sample of individuals. That research could examine differences in trust-building beliefs and practices regarding gender, race, socioeconomic status, and school community (e.g., urban, rural, or suburban). Differences in trust-building beliefs and practices among those samples could provide additional insights into trust and educational settings.

### **Staff Members' Perspectives**

This study identified trust-building narratives from principals' perspectives. Given the limited research on staff trust of the principal, this should be an area of continued research (Handford & Leithwood, 2013). In addition, staff members' narratives on trust also should be explored. Those could focus on trust-impacting moments that shaped their understanding of trust and their perceptions of trust-impacting situations.

### **Social-Emotional Training**

This study yielded findings on the importance of leaders reflecting on their and others' actions in learning about trust. Experience was identified as an essential factor in shaping participants' views and actions around trust. Future research should explore how principal-training programs and licensure routes prepare future leaders for their trust-building responsibilities.

This study also found the importance of social-emotional skills, such as reflection, self-awareness, social awareness, empathy, and perspective taking. Principals should receive explicit training on these skills through professional development. An understanding of these skills can be measured with pre- and post-surveys completed by the participants. How learning about social-emotional skills translates into trust-building practices also could be examined by collecting data from principals and staff members on their perceptions of trust-building effectiveness of social-emotional practices.

The Massachusetts Administrator Evaluation (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, n.d.-a) makes little reference to measuring social emotional skills. Thus, additional research could focus on how principals' social-emotional skills could be evaluated. A research-based tool that measures and supports the social-emotional growth of school principals could be developed to evaluate these skills.

### **Final Reflections**

I started my dissertation journey looking to develop a more in-depth understanding of trust, with an aim to understand how the school principals' experiences affected their perceptions of trust. As a school psychologist and aspiring administrator, I wanted to hear currently practicing school leaders' stories to identify transformational influences and information to support soon-to-be principals, such as myself, improve their relationships and leadership practices. Coming into this process, I believed that the relationship between a principal and their staff members was imperative in schools and that trust was the foundation for these relationships.

As a school psychologist, I engaged in strong relationships with mentors and school administration in which I was aware that trust was present but did not fully understand why. I



knew these individuals cared for me and I perceived them to have my best interest in mind. From my training as a school psychologist and my practical experiences with students and staff, I knew that relationships were important for not only school functioning, but also school culture, morale, and individual happiness. As a teacher-leader, I would reflect on the principals' actions and decisions and make judgements based on only what I observed.

During this dissertation journey, I had the opportunity to transition into a school principal role. Conducting this study, as well as the findings of the study, influenced my beliefs and actions as an early career principal. As I began to engage in leadership actions, I became aware of the multiple factors and components of actions. That is, what I observed as a school psychologist was not the whole picture. The development of trust was important, but many factors were at play when leading an entire school. This awareness has driven me to become more transparent with staff to help them see beyond what they perceive of my leadership actions and decisions.

I continually reflect on the learning that occurred through engaging in this research. Participants in my study reported that their experiences influenced their beliefs about trust; this study has done the same for me. As a result, I identified several principles that will guide my practice as a school leader, including my understanding of the ongoing, multifaceted nature of trust-building, the necessity of intentionality in my behavior, and the need for restorative actions when trust is broken.

My biggest take-away from this study is the ongoing nature and shaping of an individual's understanding of trust. Trust is not the product of a one-time activity. This study has expanded my thinking: Trust goes beyond a single action. It will be shaped continuously through interacting with others. I have learned from my time as a principal that some

decisions will not make everyone happy. With the understanding that trust is ever changing, I am intentional in attempting to increase positive interactions with individuals who may interpret my decision-making as an action that decreases trust.

Coming into this study, I also fell into a similar thought pattern the participants reported—I had thought a certain behavior increased or decreased trust. I did not pay much attention to the other factors. However, trust does not occur in a vacuum. When reflecting on interactions with staff, I remind myself that there is a complexity to every situation, and multiple factors affect trust. Now, when reflecting on situations, I am aware of the other factors at play, which provides me with a more holistic view of each situation.

I began this journey with the belief that trust is the foundation for relationships within schools. Although I still hold this belief, my thinking has expanded. I ruminate about my interactions with staff to ensure intentionality of my behaviors. I analyze the actions I take to ensure they are, above all, honest and open. I am cognizant of the impact when trust is broken and I cognitively reflect, as well as seek feedback, when situations can produce a trust-diminishing effect. Principals have the unique opportunity to develop strong, trusting relationships with their staff members. My understanding of trust has expanded, and I have benefited tremendously from conducting this study. I hope other principals and school leaders will benefit as well.

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**Appendix A: Interview Script and Protocol**

## **Interview Protocol**

Scripted introduction for interview protocol

Date of Interview:

Time of Interview:

Grades serviced:

Gender:

***Interviewer:** Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. The information you provide is helpful to the completion of my study and the results will help inform and improve practice.*

*(Hand the participant the consent form.) Here is a letter of consent that provides information on your participation in the study. Take a moment to read the letter and please ask me any questions you may have. It is important that you understand all information before making the decision to participate in the interview. Feel free to ask questions if something is unclear. If you understand and agree to participate, please sign the bottom of the form.*

*As stated in the letter of consent, you can withdraw your consent to participate at any time.*

*You may keep the gift card, even if you choose to withdraw your participation at any time. If you choose to withdraw your consent at any time, it will be without consequences or judgement from the researcher.*

*This interview will be audio recorded and later transcribed by the researcher. Follow-up contact may occur for clarification or additional questions.*

***Do you have any questions before we begin? .... Ok let's begin.***

Table A1. *Interview Questions*

Core questions	Possible probes	Possible follow-up/subsequent interview
Please tell me about your school. What do you notice about the trust that exists? What do you notice about the trust that exists among colleagues and administrators?	How did that make you feel? Can you tell me about your thought process?	When did you first become aware of the importance of school staff's trust of the principal? Please explain this experience.
What do you believe your role is in building trust with your staff?	When did you first become aware of ____.	What challenges have you encountered when attempting to build trust with your staff? Describe these experiences. What resources/supports do you think could have helped you in these experiences?
What signs indicate to you that your educators trust you?	Can you tell me more about the situation/environment?	Describe the environmental factors that supported trust-building with your staff.
What ways does trust influence the functioning of schools you are associated with or have been associated?	Was this impacted by a past experience?	How have you adapted your professional practice over time due to your experiences and knowledge of trust-building with your staff?
Please recall some experiences either as an administrator or working under an administrator that shaped your views on trust within schools.	What did you predict would happen?	What advice would you give a new or aspiring principal with regard to building trust with his or her staff?
Follow-up: Were any especially influential? Why?	What was the outcome?	
Please describe some experiences that promoted staff trust of the principal.		
Please describe some experiences that diminished staff trust of the principal.		



**Appendix B: Email Requesting Participation in Study**

<School Principal Name>

My name is Emily Abbondanza-Luuri and I am a doctoral candidate at Lesley University in Cambridge, MA. I've obtained your contacting email via the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education indicating you are an elementary school principal within the Metro-West area. I would like to invite you to be a part of a research study focusing on trust within schools.

If you have three or more years of experience as a principal, I would like to invite you to participate in a study focused on the experiences of elementary school principals regarding trust and trust-building practices with their staff. If you decide to participate, you will receive a \$25 Amazon gift card prior to engaging in the initial interview as compensation for your time. Please note, participation in this study is voluntary and you may keep the gift card, even if you choose to withdraw your participation at any time. If you choose to withdraw your consent at any time, it will be without consequences or judgement from the researcher.

You were selected because of your status as an elementary school principal in the MetroWest area of Massachusetts. Participation in this study requires one face-to-face interview of about 30 to 40 minutes in duration, with the possibility of a second interview and/or additional contact to clarify or gather more specific information.

This study will protect the identities of the participants. Pseudonyms will be used, and all identifiers will be removed. All hard copies of data will be stored in locked file cabinets to which the researcher has sole access. All computer files will be password protected. All data will be kept in a protected format for five years and then destroyed.

You are free to withdraw your consent and to discontinue participation at any time without prejudice. The findings from the research will be published in my dissertation and will become part of the repository of research on school and community collaborations.

I recognize that you are busy and with that in mind I respectfully ask for your cooperation in helping me complete this study. If you are interested in participating in this study, please [click on this link](#) to provide some basic contact information.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to email me at xxxxxxxx@Lesley.edu or via phone at (xxx) xxx-xxx.

Sincerely,

Emily Abbondanza-Luuri  
PhD Candidate  
Lesley University  
xxxxxxx@Lesley.edu  
(xxx) xxx-xxx

## **Appendix C: Themes and Categories**

## **Themes/Categories**

### **External Sources of Influence**

School leader

Mentor

Childhood caregiver

Literature

### **Internal Sources of Influence**

Beliefs

Genetic trait

Pursuit of growth

Reflection

### **Social Emotional Skills**

Self-awareness

*(Reflection)*

*(Feeling)*

Social awareness

*(Perspective taking)*

*(Relationship Building)*

*(Conflict Resolution)*

### **Trust-Building Actions**

Trust-building practices: Benevolence

Trust-building practices: Reliability

Trust-building practices: Competence

Trust-building practices: Openness

Trust-building practices: Honesty

### **Trust Diminishing Actions**

Trust-diminishing practices: Benevolence

Trust-diminishing practices: Reliability

Trust-diminishing practices: Competence

Trust-diminishing practices: Openness

Trust-diminishing practices: Honesty

Trust Practices: Repair

**Appendix D: Letter of Consent: Interview**

Dear Participant,

My name is Emily Abbondanza-Luuri and I am a doctoral candidate at Lesley University in Cambridge, MA. Thank you for your consideration in participating in my research study. The purpose of this letter is to provide you with information on your participation. It is important for you to know, participation in this study is voluntary and that you can withdraw consent at any time. The participation in this study is completely anonymous and confidential. All names will be removed.

The purpose of this study is to gain principal's insights and experiences regarding their views on trust and trust- building trust with their staff. As part of this study, interviews will be conducted in which participants will be asked a series of question in regard to their experiences with building trust as a principal. The interview will take 30-40 minutes. It will be audio recorded and later transcribed for purposes of accuracy and data collection. Second round interviews and/or additional contact may be requested. Observation and document review may be used at the suggestion of the participant to provide the researcher with examples of trust building.

This study will protect the identities of the participants. Pseudonyms will be used, and all identifiers will be removed. All hard copies of data will be stored in locked file cabinets to which the researcher has sole access. All computer files will be password protected. Data will be kept in a protected format for five years and then destroyed.

You are free to withdraw your consent and to discontinue participation at any time without prejudice. The findings from the research will be published in my dissertation and will

become part of the repository of research on school and community collaborations. At the end of the study, a summary of the findings will be available at your request.

There are no known risks to participating in this research study. There is a possibility of discomfort due to sharing experiences and stories in regard to your personal experiences and professional practice. Participants will receive a \$25 Amazon gift card prior to engaging in the interview. Please note, participation in this study is voluntary and you may keep the gift card, even if you choose to withdraw your participation at any time. If you choose to withdraw your consent at any time, it will be without consequences or judgement from the researcher.

Questions are welcome before, during, and after participation in the study. Contact information for the researcher and supervisor are listed below. If complaints or concerns arise, you are encouraged to contact the Committee for Human Subjects in Research at Lesley University at [irb@lesley.edu](mailto:irb@lesley.edu).

Your signature below indicates your understanding and consent to participate in this study.

Sincerely,

Emily Abbondanza-Luuri  
PhD Candidate  
Lesley University  
xxxxxxx@Lesley.edu  
(xxx) xxx-xxx

Barbara Govendo  
Senior Advisor  
Lesley University  
xxxxxxx@Lesley.edu



I, \_\_\_\_\_, understand and consent to participating in the research study.  
(Print Name)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Signature Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Investigator's Signature Date

**Appendix E: Lesley University IRB Approval**



29 Everett Street  
 Cambridge, MA 02138  
 Tel 617 349 8234  
 Fax 617 349 8190  
 irb@lesley.edu

### **Institutional Review Board**

DATE: 12/21/17

To: Emily Abbondanza-Luuri

From: Dr. Robyn Flaum Cruz & Dr. Ulas Kaplan, Co-Chairs, Lesley IRB

**RE: IRB Number: 17/18 - 034**

The application for the research project, "Elementary School Principals' Experiences with Trust and Trust-building" provides a detailed description of the recruitment of participants, the method of the proposed research, the protection of participants' identities and the confidentiality of the data collected. The consent form is sufficient to ensure voluntary participation in the study and contains the appropriate contact information for the researcher and the IRB.

This application is approved for one calendar year from the date of approval.

You may conduct this project.

**Date of approval of application: 12/21/17**

Investigators shall immediately suspend an inquiry if they observe an adverse change in the health or behavior of a subject that may be attributable to the research. They shall promptly report the circumstances to the IRB. They shall not resume the use of human subjects without the approval of the IRB.